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# PREFACES AND ESSAYS

BY

THE LATE

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1933

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH

## PREFACE

IN his Will my father expressed the wish that if his "Introductions", etc., were to be collected and published, the advice of Professor Oliver Elton should be obtained, and that Messrs. Macmillan should undertake the publication.

I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to Professor Elton, who has not only given his advice, but has most kindly undertaken the selection for, and the editing of, this book for me.

I also take this opportunity of thanking the various Publishers who have so kindly given permission for the reprinting of this collection.

CHRISTOPHER SAINTSBURY

EDINBURGH

*October 1933*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE publishers desire to acknowledge their indebtedness to those who have kindly allowed the late Professor Saintsbury's contributions to their own collected editions and other publications to be included in the present volume. The list is as follows:

Messrs. George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., for the Introductions to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Marmontel's *Moral Tales*.

The Editor of *The Bookman*, for the article on Walter Pater.

The Chiswick Press, for the Preface to Swift's *Polite Conversation*.

Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., for the Introductions to the works of Fielding and Sterne, the excerpt from the Introduction to Balzac's *Wild Ass's Skin*, and the passage from Professor Saintsbury's *The Earl of Derby*.

Messrs. Grayson & Grayson, Ltd., for the Introduction to *Tales from Flaubert*.

Messrs. Morrison & Gibb, Ltd., for the Introductions to the works of Smollett.

The Navarre Society, Ltd., for the Introduction to *The Heptameron*.

Messrs. Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., and the Caxton Publishing Company, for the Introduction to *Selected Poems of Longfellow*.

Messrs. Rivingtons, Ltd., for the Introduction to *Seventeenth Century Lyrics*.

Messrs. George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., for the Introduction to Sir E. K. Chambers's *Poems of Donne*.

## NOTE

IN the preface to the four volumes of *Collected Essays and Papers* published ten years ago by Messrs. Dent & Sons, Professor Saintsbury, referring to the “numerous and sometimes bulky introductions” which he had prefixed to editions, selections, and translations of certain literary classics, remarks that he “should rather like to see them together”; and, as will be seen from Mr. Christopher Saintsbury’s preface here, the wish persisted. The aim of the present volume is to fulfil it as far as possible. Most of these studies were written between 1882 and 1895, during the author’s years of presswork; some, again, between 1919 and 1929, after his retirement from Edinburgh. He also came back to his old industry as a reviewer; and, thanks to Mr. Christopher Saintsbury, many signed notices and articles are preserved, which appeared in various periodicals (*The Dial*, *The Bookman*), and where the writer, already past his eightieth year, is still to be seen with “tackle trim, sails filled, and streamers waving”. Accordingly, the mass of unreprinted material is large; and selection is not always easy, so high is the level of the workmanship. The Bodleian catalogue contains more than forty entries of prefaces and the like. Still,

the contents of this volume have in some measure selected themselves. A good many of the introductions could not well be severed from the texts, French or English, which they usher in. Some have been already reprinted, such as the *Considerations on Thackeray* (1931). Again, the matter has often appeared, in a more lasting and satisfactory form, either in the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, or in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, or elsewhere. In the result, I have been able to include, not only the articles on nearly all the classic authors who are specified by Saintsbury in his preface to *Collected Essays*, but some other precious salvage.

It will be seen that most of these papers are concerned with English or with French fiction. Those upon Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Peacock form a natural sequence, and are reprinted entire. The biographical matter, though amplified at some points by other scholars since Saintsbury wrote, is apt and sufficient for his purpose; and it is too much interlaced with the critical matter to admit of interference. In the case of Sterne, two introductions, far apart in date, are reproduced; they show how the author kept abreast of scholarship, and also the interesting changes—not indeed in his views, but in his manner of writing—that came with the years. I have omitted, with some regret, the lengthy historical prelude to the pages on the *Heptaméron*. It is a pleasure to have rescued from their



obscurity the essays on Lord Derby's *Iliad*, on Edgar Allan Poe, and on Walter Pater. More familiar is the appreciation of Donne, which is to be found in Sir Edmund Chambers's edition of the poet. Were I forced to choose, I should call this Saintsbury's most eloquent and individual piece of writing, in brief compass, upon any poet. Among prose writers, he seems to speak with peculiar zest of Fielding and of Flaubert; catholic as he is, Saintsbury seldom leaves us in doubt as to his favourites. Here, and throughout, his text and notes have been left unaltered, save for some minute corrections. The few editorial notes appended are in square brackets.

Saintsbury's style is something of an acquired taste; it has been known to perplex young students, and it has annoyed many a purist. One way to relish it was to know the man, to whom the style was wholly natural; but now he is gone, and it is through the style that the reader must appreciate the man. He, from the first was inclined to let the purist go hang; and he professed small regard for the purist or for the formal grammarian. But with time came a certain change. At first Saintsbury's English is more regular, in the good tradition of the essay: restrained, it may be, by the compulsion laid upon the journalist to fall in with the idiom of "the paper", or by the educational purpose of one who writes for colleges and schools. But here, too, there is many a spurt and sparkle, and all is good

reading. More freedom and colour are allowed in speaking to the educated reader upon the seventeenth-century lyric, or on Donne; and many of these short overtures are among Saintsbury's best and most finished compositions. Yet, later still, when he is no longer in any uniform, academic or scholastic, however admirably tailored, but in mufti, and can walk at large,—then, indeed, his style is *released*: he is in easy, odd, defiant, and bright apparel:—odd, not for oddness' sake, but for comfort's sake, and because the dress is all his own. This kind of writing is seen, above all, in his *Scrap-Books*: you may take it or leave it; if you like it, he is pleased; if not, he does not greatly care. It has certainly attracted not only many a scholar but many who read simply for pleasure and who enjoy the quips, and twirls, and sallies, and parentheses, and allusions.

I believe that the papers here collected will sustain Saintsbury's reputation. Often they tell us much about himself. His articles of faith as a critic are clearly defined in his study of Walter Pater. On Poe he talks, for the moment, like a rhythm-intoxicated man—no bad thing to be; and we perceive the driving force that is behind his books on the scansion of verse and prose. In the preface (page 94) to *Peregrine Pickle* there is an *apologia*, rather melancholy, yet dignified and courageous, for the labours of the critic-journalist,—the man who “pays” for his “facility” and “versatility” by “a

certain falling short of the best things". And he adds: "the only consolation that I know for those who are gifted with the lower talent is that they can at least recognise the higher genius". Saintsbury here must be thinking of himself; for again and again he disclaims the possession of the creative gift, and says that his job is to understand and appreciate and to aid others to do the like. But he is also unjust to himself, seeing that criticism is a craft, and may be a fine art; may be good literature, even if only in rare, in almost numerable instances is it great literature. Men of our calling had best be modest; quickly the night-wind sweeps us away, and the traces of us! Saintsbury, for all his brave positive way of speaking, was modest; and well for those who can leave behind them half as much as he has left of literature that is sound and fine.

OLIVER ELTON



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FRONTISPIECE. GEORGE SAINTSBURY, from a Photograph  
by Elliott & Fry, Ltd.

## SWIFT

### POLITE CONVERSATION

IN some ways nothing could be a better introduction to the *Polite Conversation* than the account of it which Mr. Thackeray has given in his *English Humourists* (though under the head of Steele, not Swift), as illustrating the society of the period. That account is in its way not much less of a classic than the immortal original itself, and it is purely delightful. But it neither deals nor pretends to deal with the whole of the subject. Indeed, the idea of Swift's character which the *Conversation* gives does not square altogether well with the view—true, but one-sided—which it suited Mr. Thackeray to take of Swift.

The *Conversation* appeared very late in Swift's life, and he himself derived no pecuniary benefit from it. He had, with that almost careless generosity which distinguished him side by side with an odd kind of parsimony, given the manuscript to a not particularly reputable *protégée* of his, Mrs. Barber, about 1736, and its first edition—a copy of which, presented to me by my friend Mr. Austin Dobson no small number of years ago, is here reproduced—bears date 1738, and was published in London by Motte and Bathurst. The composition, however, dates, as is known to a practical certainty, many years earlier. It is beyond any reasonable doubt identical with the *Essay on Conversation*

which Swift noted as written or planned in 1708-10. The *nom de guerre* on the title-page and to the introduction is Simon Wagstaff, one of the literary family of Staffs fathered by Swift and Steele in *Tatler* times. The manners are evidently those of Queen Anne's day, and the whole chronology of the introduction (which, it will be seen, has all Swift's mock carefulness and exactitude) is adjusted to the first decade of the eighteenth century. A hundred years later Scott (whose own evident relish for the *Conversation* struggled somewhat with a desire to apologise for its coarseness to the decencies even of his own day) hazarded the opinion that the abundance of proverbial expressions must be set down to the Dean's own fancy, not to actual truth of reporting. It is always with great diffidence that I venture to differ with Sir Walter; but I think he was wrong here. One piece of indirect evidence—the extreme energy with which Chesterfield, at no very distant date from the publication, but after a lapse of fully a generation from the probable composition of the dialogues, inveighs against this very practice—would seem to be sufficient to establish its authenticity. For polite society, where its principles are not, as they generally are, pretty constant, is never so bitter as against those practices which were the mode and are now *démodés*.

But if anyone thinks this argument paradoxical, there are plenty more. The conversation of the immortal eight corresponds exactly to that of the comedies of the time, and the times just earlier, which were written by the finest gentlemen. It meets us, of course less



brilliantly put, in the *Wentworth Papers* and other documents of the time; and its very faults are exactly those which Steele and Addison, like their predecessors of the other sex in the Hôtel Rambouillet sixty or seventy years earlier, were, just when these dialogues were written, setting themselves to correct. We know, of course, that Swift moved in a world of middle and even not always upper middle class society, as well as in the great world; and that, perhaps, at the date of the actual composition of this piece, he had not reached his fullest familiarity with the latter. But I have myself very little doubt that the dialogues express and were fully justified by the conversation he had actually heard among the less decorous visitors at Temple's solemn board, in the livelier household of Lord Berkeley, in the circles of Ormonde and Pembroke, and during his first initiation after 1707 in London society proper. How far he may have subsequently polished and altered the thing it is impossible to say; that he had done so to some extent is obvious from such simple matters as the use of the word "king" instead of "queen", from the allusions to the *Craftsman*, and others. I doubt whether the picture became substantially false till far into the reign of George II, if it even became so then.

There are those, of whom, as Mr. Wagstaff would himself say, "I have the honour to be one", who put the *Polite Conversation* in the very front rank of Swift's works. It is of course on a far less ambitious scale than *Gulliver*; it has not the youthful audacity and towering aim of the *Tale of a Tub*; it lacks the practical and businesslike cogency of the *Drapier*; the absolute per-

fection and unrivalled irony of the *Modest Proposal* and the *Argument against abolishing Christianity*. But what it wants in relation to each of these masterpieces in some respects it makes up in others; and it is distinctly the superior of its own nearest analogue, the *Directions to Servants*. It is never unequal; it never flags; it never forces the note. Nobody, if he likes it at all, can think it too long; nobody, however much he may like it, can fail to see that Swift was wise not to make it longer. One of its charms is the complete variation between the introduction and the dialogues themselves. The former follows throughout, even to the rather unnecessary striking in with literary quarrels, the true vein of Swiftian irony, where almost every sentence expresses the exact contrary of the author's real sentiments, and where the putative writer is made to exhibit himself as ridiculous while discoursing to his own complete satisfaction. It exhibits also, although in a minor key, the peculiar pessimism which excites the shudders of some and the admiration of others in the great satires on humanity enumerated above.

But the dialogues themselves are quite different. They are, with the exception of the lighter passages in the *Journal to Stella*, infinitely the most good-natured things in Swift. The characters are scarcely satirised; they are hardly caricatured. Not one of them is made disagreeable, not one of them offensively ridiculous. Even poor Sir John Linger, despite the scarce concealed scorn and pity of his companions and the solemn compassion of good Mr. Wagstaff, is let off very easily. The very "scandal-mongering" has nothing of the

ferocity of the *Plain Dealer* long before, and the *School for Scandal* long after it; the excellent Ladies Smart and Answerall tear their neighbours' characters to pieces with much relish but with no malignity. The former, for all her cut-and-dried phrases, is an excellently hospitable hostess, and "her own lord" is as different as possible from the brutal heroes of Restoration comedy, and from the yawning sour-blooded rakes of quality whom a later generation of painters in words and colours were to portray. There is, of course, not a little which would now be horribly coarse, but one knows that it was not in the least so then. And in it, as in the scandal-mongering, there is no bad blood. Tom and the Colonel and Lord Sparkish are fine gentlemen with very loose-hung tongues and not very strait-laced consciences. But there is nothing about them of the inhumanity which to some tastes spoils the heroes of Congreve and of Vanbrugh.

As for "Miss", no doubt she says some things which it would be unpleasant to hear one's sister or one's beloved say now. But I fell in love with her when I was about seventeen, I think; and from that day to this I have never wavered for one minute in my affection for her. If she is of coarser mould than Millamant, how infinitely does she excel her in flesh and blood—excellent things in woman! She is only here—"this 'Miss' of our heart, this 'Miss' of our soul,"—here and in a letter or two of the time. The dramatists and the essayists and the poets made her a baggage or a Lydia Languish, a Miss Hoyden or a minx, when they tried her. Hogarth was not enough of a gentleman and

Kneller not enough of a genius to put her on canvas. When the regular novelists began, sensibility had set its clutch on heroines. But here she is as Swift saw her—Swift whom every woman whom he knew either loved or hated, and who must, therefore, have known something about women, for all his persistent maltreatment of them. And here, as I have said, the maltreatment ceases. If the handling is not very delicate, it is utterly true, and by no means degrading. There is even dignity in Miss. For all her romps, and her broad speeches, and her more than risky repartees, she knows perfectly well how to pull up her somewhat unpolished admirers when they go too far. And when at three o'clock in the morning, with most of the winnings in her pocket, she demurely refuses the Colonel's escort (indeed it might have had its dangers), observing, "No, Colonel, thank you; my mamma has sent her chair and footmen", and leaves the room with the curtsey we can imagine, the picture is so delightful that unholy dreams come upon one. How agreeable it would have been to hire the always available villains, overcome those footmen, put Miss in a coach and six, and secure the services of the also always available parson, regardless of the feelings of my mamma and of the swords of Tom and the Colonel, though not of Miss's own goodwill! For I should not envy anyone who had tried to play otherwise than on the square with Miss Notable.

For Mr. Wagstaff's hero I have, as no doubt is natural, by no means as much admiration as for his "heroine". Mr. Thomas Neverout is a lively youth enough, but considerably farther from the idea—and

that not merely the modern idea—of a gentleman, than Miss with all her astounding licence of speech is from the idea—and that not merely the modern idea—of a lady. It is observable that he seldom or never gets the better of her except by mere coarseness, and that he has too frequent recourse to the expedient which even Mr. Wagstaff had the sense to see was not a great evidence of wit, the use of some innuendo or other, at which she is obliged to blush or to pretend want of understanding. At fair weapons she almost always puts him down. In fact, the Colonel, though not precisely a genius, is the better fellow of the two. I do not know whether it was intentional or not, but it is to be observed that my Lord Sparkish, though quite as “smart”, in the new-old sense of which this very work is the *locus classicus*, as the two commoners, is cleaner by a good deal in his language. It is unlike Mr. Wagstaff’s usual precision of information that he gives us no details about Lady Answerall. If there is any indication to show whether she was wife or widow, I have missed it in many readings; but I think she, though still young, was the eldest of the three ladies, and she certainly was handsome. Lady Smart I take to have been plain, from her disparaging reference to Miss: “The girl’s well enough if she had but another nose”. I resent this reference to a feature which I am sure was charming (it was probably *retroussé*; it was certainly not aquiline); and as Lady Smart was clearly not ill-natured, it follows that she must have been herself either a recognised beauty or not beautiful. We should have had some intimation of the former had it been the case, so I incline to the latter.

She had children, and was evidently on the best of terms with her husband, which is very satisfactory.

If it were not for Miss and the dinner—two objects of perennial interest to all men of spirit and taste—I am not sure that I should not prefer the introduction to the conversations themselves. It is indispensable to the due understanding of the latter, and I cannot but think that Thackeray unjustifiably overlooked the excuse it contains for the somewhat miscellaneous and Gargantuan character of the feast which excited his astonishment and horror. But it would be delightful in itself if we were so unfortunate as to have lost the conversations, and, as I have already said, its delight is of a strangely different kind from theirs. Although there are more magnificent and more terrible, more poignant and more whimsical examples of the marvellous Swiftian irony, I do not know that there is any more justly proportioned, more exquisitely modulated, more illustrative of that wonderful keeping which is the very essence and quiddity of the Dean's humour.

Some things have been lately said, as they are always said from time to time, about the contrast between the Old humour and the New. The contrast, I venture to think, is wrongly stated. It is not a contrast between the old and the new, but, in the first place between the perennial and the temporary, and in the second between two kinds of humour which, to do them justice, are both perennial enough—the humour which is quiet, subtle, abstracted, independent of catch-words and cant phrases, and the humour which is broad, loud, gesticulative, and prone to rely upon cant

phrases and catchwords. Swift has illustrated the two in the two parts of this astonishing book, and whoso looks into the matter a little narrowly will have no difficulty in finding this out. Far be it from me to depreciate the "newer" kind, but I may be permitted to think it the lower. It is certainly the easier. The perpetual stream of irony which Swift pours out here in so quiet yet so steady a flow is the most difficult of all things to maintain in its perfection. Not more, perhaps, than half a dozen writers in all literature, of whom the three chiefs are Lucian, Pascal, and Swift himself, have been quite masters of it, and of these three Swift is the mightiest. Sink below the requisite proportion of bitterness and the thing becomes flat; exceed that proportion and it is nauseous. Perhaps, as one is always fain to persuade oneself in such cases, a distinct quality of palate is required to taste, as well as a distinct power of genius to brew it. It is certain that though there are some in all times who relish this kind of humour (and this is what gives it its supremacy, for examples of the other kind are, at other than their own times, frequently not relished by anybody), they are not often found in large numbers. The liquor is too dry for many tastes; it has too little froth, if not too little sparkle, for others. The order of architecture is too unadorned, depends too much upon the bare attraction of symmetry and form, to charm some eyes. But those who have the taste never lose it, never change it, never are weary of gratifying it. Of irony, as of hardly any other thing under the sun, cometh no satiety to the born ironist.

It may be well to end this brief preface by a few words on the principles of editing which I have adopted. There is no omission whatever, except of a very few words—not, I think, half a score in all—which were barely permissible to mouths polite even then, and which now are almost banished from even free conversation. Nor have even these omissions been allowed to mutilate the passages in which they occur; for on Mr. Wagstaff's own excellent principle, the harmless necessary "blank, which the sagacious reader may fill up in his own mind", has replaced them.

In respect of annotation, the methods of the collection in which this book appears did not permit of any very extensive commentary; and I could not be sorry for this. Anything like full *scholia* on the proverbs, catchwords, and so forth used, would be enormously voluminous, and a very dull overlaying of matter ill-sortable with dulness. Besides, much of the phraseology is intelligible to anybody intelligent, and not a very little is not yet obsolete in the mouths of persons of no particular originality. You may still hear men and women, not necessarily destitute either of birth, breeding, or sense, say of such a thing that "they like it, but it does not like them", that such another thing "comes from a hot place", with other innocent *clichés* of the kind. But in some places where assistance seemed really required I have endeavoured to give it. Among such cases I have not included the attempt to identify "the D. of R.", "the E. of E.", "Lord and Lady H.", etc. I am afraid it would be falling too much into the humour of good Mr. Wagstaff himself to examine, with



the help of much Collins, the various persons whose initials and titles might possibly correspond with these during the nearly sixty years between Mr. Wagstaff's coming of age and the appearance of his work at the Middle Temple Gate in Fleet Street. The persons named at full length are generally if not universally real, and more or less well known. Enough to inform or remind the reader of these has, I hope, been inserted in the notes. But the fact is, that, like most great writers, though not all, Swift is really not in need of much annotation. It is not that he is not allusive—I hardly know any great writer who is not—but that his allusions explain themselves to a reader of average intelligence quite sufficiently for the understanding of the context, though not, it may be, sufficiently to enable him to "satisfy the examiners". It does not, for instance, matter in the least whether the "infamous Court chaplain", who taught the maids of honour not to believe in Hell, was Hoadley, or who he was. His cap may even have fitted several persons at different times. In such a display of literary skill at arms as this, the glitter of the blade and the swashing blow of its wielder are the points of interest, not the worthless carrion into which it was originally thrust. But "worthless carrion" is not Polite Conversation: so let me leave the reader to what is.

## FIELDING

### INTRODUCTION

THERE are few amusements more dangerous for an author than the indulgence in ironic descriptions of his own work. If the irony is depreciatory, posterity is but too likely to say, "Many a true word is spoken in jest"; if it is encomiastic, the same ruthless and ungrateful critic is but too likely to take it as an involuntary confession of folly and vanity. But when Fielding, in one of his serio-comic introductions to *Tom Jones*, described it as "this prodigious work", he all unintentionally (for he was the least pretentious of men) anticipated the verdict which posterity almost at once, and with ever-increasing suffrage of the best judges as time went on, was about to pass not merely upon this particular book, but upon his whole genius and his whole production as a novelist. His work in other kinds is of a very different order of excellence. It is sufficiently interesting at times in itself; and always more than sufficiently interesting as his. Until the present occasion came (which made it necessary that I should acquaint myself with them) I own that my own knowledge of these miscellaneous writings was by no means thorough. It is now pretty complete; but the idea which I previously had of them at first and second hand, though a little improved, has not very materially altered. Though in all this hack-

work Fielding displayed, partially and at intervals, the same qualities which he displayed eminently and constantly in the four great books here given, he was not, as the French idiom expresses it, *dans son assiette*, in his own natural and impregnable disposition and situation of character and ability, when he was occupied on it. The novel was for him that *assiette*.

Although Henry Fielding lived in quite modern times, although by family and connections he was of a higher rank than most men of letters, and although his genius was at once recognised by his contemporaries so soon as it displayed itself in its proper sphere, his biography until very recently was by no means full; and the most recent researches, including those of Mr. Austin Dobson—a critic unsurpassed for combination of literary faculty and knowledge of the eighteenth century—have not altogether sufficed to fill up the gaps. His family, said to have descended from a member of the great house of Hapsburg who came to England in the reign of Henry II, distinguished itself in the Wars of the Roses, and in the seventeenth century was advanced to the peerages of Denbigh in England and (later) of Desmond in Ireland. The novelist was the grandson of John Fielding, Canon of Salisbury, the fifth son of the first Earl of Desmond of this creation. The canon's third son, Edmond, entered the army, served under Marlborough, and married Sarah Gold or Gould, daughter of a judge of the King's Bench. Their eldest son was Henry, who was born on April 22, 1707, and had an uncertain number of brothers and sisters of the whole blood. After his first wife's death, General

Fielding (for he attained that rank) married again. The most remarkable offspring of the marriage, next to Henry, was his sister Sarah, also a novelist, who wrote *David Simple*; of the second, John, afterwards Sir John Fielding, who, though blind, succeeded his half-brother as a Bow Street magistrate, and in that office combined an equally honourable record with a longer tenure.

Fielding was born at Sharpham Park in Somersetshire, the seat of his maternal grandfather; but most of his early youth was spent at East Stour in Dorsetshire, to which his father removed after the judge's death. He is said to have received his first education under a parson of the neighbourhood named Oliver, in whom a very uncomplimentary tradition sees the original of Parson Trulliber. He was then certainly sent to Eton, where he did not waste his time as regards learning, and made several valuable friends. But the dates of his entering and leaving school are alike unknown; and his subsequent sojourn at Leyden for two years—though there is no reason to doubt it—depends even less upon any positive documentary evidence. This famous University still had a great repute as a training school in law, for which profession he was intended; but the reason why he did not receive the even then far more usual completion of a public school education by a sojourn at Oxford or Cambridge may be suspected to be different. It may even have had something to do with a curious escapade of his, about which not very much is known—an attempt to carry off a pretty heiress of Lyme, named Sarah Andrew.

Even at Leyden, however, General Fielding seems to have been unable or unwilling to pay his son's expenses, which must have been far less there than at an English University; and Henry's return to London in 1728-9 is said to have been due to sheer impecuniosity. When he returned to England, his father was good enough to make him an allowance of £200 nominal, which appears to have been equivalent to £50 actual. And as practically nothing is known of him for the next six or seven years, except the fact of his having worked industriously enough at a large number of not very good plays of the lighter kind, with a few poems and miscellanies, it is reasonably enough supposed that he lived by his pen. The only product of this period which has kept (or indeed which ever received) competent applause is *Tom Thumb, or the Tragedy of Tragedies*, a following, of course, of the *Rehearsal*, but full of humour and spirit. The most successful of his other dramatic works were the *Mock Doctor* and the *Miser*, adaptations of Molière's famous pieces. His undoubted connection with the stage, and the fact of the contemporary existence of a certain Timothy Fielding, helped suggestions of less dignified occupations as actor, booth-keeper, and so forth; but these have long been discredited and, indeed, disproved.

In 1734, when Fielding was twenty-seven, we find him in a new, a more brilliant and agreeable, but even a more transient phase. He married Miss Charlotte Cradock, one of three sisters who lived at Salisbury (it is to be observed that Fielding's entire connections, both in life and letters, are with the Western Counties and London), who were certainly of competent means,

and for whose alleged illegitimacy there is no evidence but an unsupported fling of that old maid of genius, Richardson. The descriptions both of Sophia and of Amelia are said to have been taken from this lady; her good looks and her amiability are as well established as anything of the kind can be in the absence of photographs and affidavits; and it is certain that her husband was passionately attached to her, during their too short married life. His method, however, of showing his affection smacked in some ways too much of the foibles which he has attributed to Captain Booth, and of those which we must suspect Mr. Thomas Jones would also have exhibited, if he had not been adopted as Mr. Allworthy's heir, and had not had Mr. Western's fortune to share and look forward to. It is true that grave breaches have been made by recent criticism in the very picturesque and circumstantial story told on the subject by Murphy, the first of Fielding's biographers. This legend was that Fielding, having succeeded by the death of his mother to a small estate at East Stour, worth about £200 a year, and having received £1500 in ready money as his wife's fortune, got through the whole in three years by keeping open house, with a large retinue in "costly yellow liveries", and so forth. In details, this story has been simply riddled. His mother had died long before; he was certainly not away from London three years, or anything like it; and so forth. At the same time, the best and soberest judges agree that there is an intrinsic probability, a consensus (if a vague one) of tradition, and a chain of almost unmistakably personal references in the novels, which plead

for a certain amount of truth at the bottom of a much embellished legend. At any rate, if Fielding established himself in the country, it was not long before he returned to town; for early in 1736 we find him back again, and not merely a playwright, but lessee of the "Little Theatre" in the Haymarket. The plays which he produced here—satirico-political pieces, such as *Pasquin* and the *Historical Register*—were popular enough, but offended the Government; and in 1737 a new bill regulating theatrical performances, and instituting the Lord Chamberlain's control, was passed. This measure put an end directly to the "Great Mogul's Company", as Fielding had called his troop, and indirectly to its manager's career as a playwright. He did indeed write a few pieces in future years, but they were of the smallest importance.

After this check he turned at last to a serious profession, entered himself of the Middle Temple in November of the same year, and was called three years later; but during these years, and indeed for some time afterwards, our information about him is still of the vaguest character. Nobody doubts that he had a large share in the *Champion*, an essay-periodical on the usual eighteenth-century model, which began to appear in 1739, and which is still occasionally consulted for the work that is certainly or probably his. He went the Western Circuit, and attended the Wiltshire Sessions, after he was called, giving up his contributions to periodicals soon after that event. But he soon returned to literature proper, or rather made his *début* in it, with the immortal book now republished. The *History of the*

*Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams* appeared in February 1742, and its author received from Andrew Millar, the publisher, the sum of £183:11s. Even greater works have fetched much smaller sums; but it will be admitted that *Joseph Andrews* was not dear.

The advantage, however, of presenting a survey of an author's life uninterrupted by criticism is so clear, that what has to be said about *Joseph* may be conveniently postponed for the moment. Immediately after its publication the author fell back upon miscellaneous writing, and in the next year (1743) collected and issued three volumes of *Miscellanies*. In the two first volumes the only thing of much interest is the unfinished and unequal, but in part powerful, *Journey from this World to the Next*, an attempt of a kind which Fontenelle and others, following Lucian, had made very popular with the time. But the third volume of the *Miscellanies* deserved a less modest and gregarious appearance, for it contained, and is wholly occupied by, the wonderful and terrible satire of *Jonathan Wild*, the greatest piece of pure irony in English out of Swift. Soon after the publication of the book a great calamity came on Fielding. His wife had been very ill when he wrote the preface; soon afterwards she was dead. They had taken the chance, had made the choice, that the more prudent and less wise student-hero and heroine of Mr. Browning's *Youth and Art* had shunned; they had no doubt "sighed deep, laughed free, Starved, feasted, despaired", and we need not question that they had also "been happy".



Except this sad event and its rather incongruous sequel, Fielding's marriage to his wife's maid, Mary Daniel—a marriage, however, which did not take place till full four years later, and which by all accounts supplied him with a faithful and excellent companion and nurse, and his children with a kind stepmother—little or nothing is again known of this elusive man of genius between the publication of the *Miscellanies* in 1743 and that of *Tom Jones* in 1749. The second marriage itself in November 1747; an interview which Joseph Warton had with him rather more than a year earlier (one of the very few direct interviews we have); the publication of two anti-Jacobite newspapers (Fielding was always a strong Whig and Hanoverian), called the *True Patriot* and the *Jacobite's Journal*, in 1745 and the following years; some indistinct traditions about residences at Twickenham and elsewhere, and some, more precise but not much more authenticated, respecting patronage by the Duke of Bedford, Mr. Lyttelton, Mr. Allen, and others, pretty well sum up the whole.

*Tom Jones* was published in February (a favourite month with Fielding or his publisher, Millar) 1749; and as it brought him the, for those days, very considerable sum of £600, to which Millar added another hundred later, the novelist must have been, for a time at any rate, relieved from his chronic penury. But he had already, by Lyttelton's interest, secured his first and last piece of preferment, being made Justice of the Peace for Westminster, an office on which he entered with characteristic vigour. He was qualified for it not merely by a solid knowledge of the law and by great

natural abilities, but by his thorough kindness of heart; and, perhaps, it may also be added, by his long years of queer experience on (as Mr. Carlyle would have said) the "burning marl" of the London Bohemia. Very shortly afterwards he was chosen Chairman of Quarter Sessions, and established himself in Bow Street. The Bow Street magistrate of that time occupied a most singular position, and was more like a French Prefect of Police or even a Minister of Public Safety than a mere justice. Yet he was ill paid. Fielding says that the emoluments, which before his accession had but been £500 a year of "dirty" money, were by his own action but £300 of clean; and the work, if properly performed, was very severe.

That he performed it properly all competent evidence shows, a foolish, inconclusive, and, I fear it must be said, emphatically snobbish story of Walpole's notwithstanding. In particular, he broke up a gang of cut-throat thieves which had been the terror of London. But his tenure of the post was short enough, and scarcely extended to five years. His health had long been broken, and he was now constantly attacked by gout, so that he had frequently to retreat on Bath from Bow Street, or his suburban cottage of Fordhook, Ealing. But he did not relax his literary work. His pen was active with pamphlets concerning his office; *Amelia*, his last novel, appeared towards the close of 1751; and next year saw the beginning of a new paper, the *Covent Garden Journal*, which appeared twice a week, ran for the greater part of the year, and died in November. Its great author did not see that month twice again. In the

spring of 1753 he grew worse; and after a year's struggle with ill health, hard work, and hard weather, lesser measures being pronounced useless, was persuaded to try the "Portugal Voyage", of which he has left so charming a record in the *Voyage to Lisbon*. He left Fordhook on June 26, 1754, reached Lisbon in August, and, dying there on the 8th of October, was buried in the cemetery of the Estrella.

Of not many writers perhaps does a clearer notion, as far as their personality goes, exist in the general mind that interests itself at all in literature than of Fielding. Yet more than once a warning has been sounded, especially by his best and most recent biographer, to the effect that this idea is founded upon very little warranty of scripture. The truth is, that as the foregoing record—which, brief as it is, is a sufficiently faithful summary—will have shown, we know very little about Fielding. We have hardly any letters of his, and so lack the best by far and the most revealing of all character-portraits; we have but one important autobiographic fragment, and though that is of the highest interest and value, it was written far in the valley of the shadow of death, it is not in the least retrospective, and it affords but dim and inferential light on his younger, healthier, and happier days and ways. He came, moreover, just short of one set of men of letters, of whom we have a great deal of personal knowledge, and just beyond another. He was neither of those about Addison, nor of those about Johnson. No intimate friend of his has left us anything elaborate about him. On the other hand, we have a far from inconsiderable

body of documentary evidence, of a kind often by no means trustworthy. The best part of it is contained in the letters of his cousin, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and the reminiscences or family traditions of her granddaughter, Lady Louisa Stuart. But Lady Mary, vivacious and agreeable as she is, had with all her talent a very considerable knack of writing for effect, of drawing strong contrasts and the like; and it is not quite certain that she saw very much of Fielding in the last and most interesting third of his life. Another witness, Horace Walpole, to less knowledge and equally dubious accuracy, added decided ill-will, which may have been due partly to the shrinking of a dilettante and a fop from a burly Bohemian; but I fear is also consequent upon the fact that Horace could not afford to despise Fielding's birth, and knew him to be vastly his own superior in genius. We hear something of him again from Richardson; and Richardson hated him with the hatred of dissimilar genius, of inferior social position, and, lastly, of the cat for the dog who tousles and worries her. Johnson partly inherited or shared Richardson's aversion, partly was blinded to Fielding's genius by his aggressive Whiggery. I fear, too, that he was incapable of appreciating it for reasons other than political. It is certain that Johnson, sane and robust as he was, was never quite at ease before genius of the gigantic kind, either in dead or living. Whether he did not like to have to look up too much, or was actually unable to do so, it is certain that Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, and Fielding, those four Atlantes of English verse and prose, all affected him with lukewarm admiration, or with positive dislike, for

which it is vain to attempt to assign any uniform secondary cause, political or other. It may be permitted to hint another reason. All Johnson's most sharp-sighted critics have noticed, though most have discreetly refrained from insisting on, his "thorn-in-the-flesh", the combination in him of very strong physical passions with the deepest sense of the moral and religious duty of abstinence. It is perhaps impossible to imagine anything more distasteful to a man so buffeted, than the extreme indulgence with which Fielding regards, and the easy freedom, not to say gusto, with which he depicts, those who succumb to similar temptation. Only by supposing the workings of some subtle influence of this kind is it possible to explain, even in so capricious a humour as Johnson's, the famous and absurd application of the term "barren rascal" to a writer who, dying almost young, after having for many years lived a life of pleasure and then for four or five one of laborious official duty, has left work anything but small in actual bulk, and fertile with the most luxuriant growth of intellectual originality.

Partly on the *obiter dicta* of persons like these, partly on the still more tempting and still more treacherous ground of indications drawn from his works, a Fielding of fantasy has been constructed, which in Thackeray's admirable sketch attains real life and immortality as a creature of art, but which possesses rather dubious claims as a historical character. It is astonishing how this Fielding of fantasy sinks and shrivels when we begin to apply the horrid tests of criticism to his component parts. The *eidolon*, with inked ruffles and a

towel round his head, sits in the Temple and dashes off articles for the *Covent Garden Journal*; then comes Criticism, hellish maid, and reminds us that when the *Covent Garden Journal* appeared, Fielding's wild oats, if ever sown at all, had been sown long ago; that he was a busy magistrate and householder in Bow Street; and that, if he had towels round his head, it was probably less because he had exceeded in liquor than because his Grace of Newcastle had given him a headache by wanting elaborate plans and schemes prepared at an hour's notice. Lady Mary, apparently with some envy, tells us that he could "feel rapture with his cook-maid". "Which many has", as Mr. Ridley remarks, from Xanthias Phoceus downwards; but when we remember the historic fact that he married this maid (not a "cook-maid" at all), and that though he always speaks of her with warm affection and hearty respect, such "raptures" as we have of his clearly refer to a very different woman, who was both a lady and a beautiful one, we begin a little to shake our heads. Horace Walpole at second-hand draws us a Fielding pigging with low companions in a house kept like a hedge tavern; Fielding himself, within a year or two, shows us more than half-undesignedly in the *Voyage to Lisbon* that he was very careful about the appointments and decency of his table, that he stood rather upon ceremony in regard to his own treatment of his family and the treatment of them and himself by others, and that he was altogether a person orderly, correct, and even a little finikin. Nor is there the slightest reasonable reason to regard this as a piece of hypocrisy, a vice as alien from the Fielding of

fancy as from the Fielding of fact, and one the particular manifestation of which, in this particular place, would have been equally unlikely and unintelligible.

It may be asked whether I propose to substitute for the traditional Fielding a quite different person, of regular habits and methodical economy. Certainly not. The traditional estimate of great men is rarely wrong altogether, but it constantly has a habit of exaggerating and dramatising their characteristics. For some things in Fielding's career we have positive evidence of document, and evidence hardly less certain of probability. Although I believe the best judges are now of opinion that his impecuniosity has been overcharged, he certainly had experiences which did not often fall to the lot of even a cadet of good family in the eighteenth century. There can be no reasonable doubt that he was a man who had a leaning towards pretty girls and bottles of good wine; and I should suppose that if the girl were kind and fairly winsome, he would not have insisted that she should possess Helen's beauty, that if the bottle of good wine were not forthcoming, he would have been very tolerant of a mug of good ale. He may very possibly have drunk more than he should, and lost more than he could conveniently pay. It may be put down as morally ascertained that towards all these weaknesses of humanity, and others like unto them, he held an attitude which was less that of the unassailable philosopher than that of the sympathiser, indulgent and excusing. In regard more especially to what are commonly called moral delinquencies, this attitude was so decided as to shock some people even in those days,

and many in these. Just when the first sheets of this edition were passing through the press, a violent attack was made in a newspaper correspondence on the morality of *Tom Jones* by certain notorious advocates of Purity, as some say, of Pruriency and Prudery combined, according to less complimentary estimates. Even midway between the two periods we find the admirable Miss Ferrier, a sister of Fielding's own craft, who sometimes had touches of nature and satire not far inferior to his own, expressing by the mouth of one of her characters, with whom she seems partly to agree, the sentiment that his works are "vanishing like noxious exhalations". Towards any misdoing by persons of the one sex towards persons of the other, when it involved brutality or treachery, Fielding was pitiless; but when treachery and brutality were not concerned, he was, to say the least, facile. So, too, he probably knew by experience—he certainly knew by native shrewdness and acquired observation—that to look too much on the wine when it is red, or on the cards when they are parti-coloured, is ruinous to health and fortune; but he thought not over-badly of any man who did these things. Still it is possible to admit this in him, and to stop short of that idea of a careless and reckless *viveur* which has so often been put forward. In particular, Lady Mary's view of his childlike enjoyment of the moment has been, I think, much exaggerated by posterity, and was probably not a little mistaken by the lady herself. There are two moods in which the motto is *Carpe diem*; one a mood of simply childish hurry, the other one where behind the enjoyment of the



moment lurks, and in which the enjoyment of the moment is not a little heightened by, that vast ironic consciousness of the before and after, which I at least see everywhere in the background of Fielding's work.

The man, however, of whom we know so little, concerns us much less than the author of the works, of which it only rests with ourselves to know everything. I have above classed Fielding as one of the four Atlantes of English verse and prose, and I doubt not that both the phrase and the application of it to him will meet with question and demur. I have only to interject, as the critic so often has to interject, a request to the court to take what I say in the sense in which I say it. I do not mean that Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, and Fielding are in all or even in most respects on a level. I do not mean that the three last are in all respects of the greatest names in English literature. I only mean that, in a certain quality, which for want of a better word I have chosen to call Atlantean, they stand alone. Each of them, for the metaphor is applicable either way, carries a whole world on his shoulders, or looks down on a whole world from his natural altitude. The worlds are different, but they are worlds; and though the attitude of the giants is different also, it agrees in all of them on the points of competence and strength. Take whomsoever else we may among our men of letters, and we shall find this characteristic to be, in comparison, wanting. These four carry their world, and are not carried by it; and if it, in the language so dear to Fielding himself, were to crash and shatter, the inquiry,

"*Que vous reste-t-il?*" could be answered by each, "*Moi!*"

The appearance which Fielding makes is no doubt the most modest of the four. He has not Shakespeare's absolute universality, and in fact not merely the poet's tongue but the poet's thought seems to have been denied him. His sphere is not the ideal like Milton's. His irony, splendid as it is, falls a little short of that diabolical magnificence which exalts Swift to the point whence, in his own way, he surveys all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory or vainglory of them. All Fielding's critics have noted the manner, in a certain sense modest, in another ostentatious, in which he seems to confine himself to the presentation of things English. They might have added to the presentation of things English—as they appear in London, and on the Western Circuit, and on the Bath Road.

But this apparent parochialism has never deceived good judges. It did not deceive Lady Mary, who had seen the men and manners of very many climes; it did not deceive Gibbon, who was not especially prone to overvalue things English, and who could look down from twenty centuries on things ephemeral. It deceives, indeed, I am told, some excellent persons at the present day, who think Fielding's microcosm a "toylike world", and imagine that Russian Nihilists and French Naturalists have gone beyond it. It will deceive no one who has lived for some competent space of time a life during which he has tried to regard his fellow-creatures and himself, as nearly as a mortal may, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

As this is in the main an introduction to Fielding's

four great novels, the justification in detail of the estimate just made or hinted of the novelist's genius will be best; and most fitly made by a brief discussion of the four as presented; and, indeed, it is not fanciful to perceive in each book a somewhat different presentment of the author's genius; though in no one of the four is any one of his masterly qualities absent. There is tenderness even in *Jonathan Wild*; there are touches in *Joseph Andrews* of that irony of the Preacher, the last echo of which is heard amid the kindly resignation of the *Voyage to Lisbon*, in the sentence, "Whereas envy of all things most exposes us to danger from others, so contempt of all things best secures us from them". But on the whole it is safe to say that *Joseph Andrews* best presents Fielding's mischievous and playful wit; *Jonathan Wild* his half-Lucianic, half-Swiftian irony; *Tom Jones* his unerring knowledge of human nature, and his constructive faculty; *Amelia* his tenderness, his *mitis sapientia*, his observation of the details of life. And first of the first.

## JOSEPH ANDREWS

The *History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams* was, as has been said above, published in February 1742. In the agreement between author and publisher, it is not uninteresting to observe that the witness, William Young, is none other than the asserted original of the immortal Mr. Adams himself. He might, on Balzac's plea in a toler-

ably well-known anecdote, have demanded half of the £183:11s. Of the other origins of the book we have a pretty full account, partly documentary. That it is "writ in the manner of Cervantes", and is intended as a kind of comic epic, is the author's own statement—no doubt as near the actual truth as is consistent with comic-epic theory. That there are resemblances to Scarron, to Le Sage, and to other practitioners of the Picaresque novel is certain; and it was inevitable that there should be. Of directer and more immediate models or starting-points, one is undoubted; the other, though less generally admitted, not much less indubitable to my mind. The parody of Richardson's *Pamela*, which was little more than a year earlier (Nov. 1740), is avowed, open, flagrant; nor do I think that the author was so soon carried away by the greater and larger tide of his own invention as some critics seem to hold. He is always more or less returning to the ironic charge; and the multiplicity of the assailants of Joseph's virtue only disguises the resemblance to the long-drawn dangers of *Pamela* from a single ravisher. But Fielding was also well acquainted with Marivaux's *Paysan Parvenu*, and the resemblances between that book and *Joseph Andrews* are much stronger than Fielding's admirers have always been willing to admit. This recalcitrance has, I think, been mainly due to the erroneous conception of Marivaux as, if not a mere fribble, yet a Dresden-Shepherdess kind of writer, good at "preciousness" and patch-and-powder manners, but nothing more. There was, in fact, a very strong satiric and ironic touch in the author of

*Marianne*, and I do not think that I was too rash when some years ago I ventured to speak of him as "playing Fielding to his own Richardson" in the *Paysan Parvenu*.

Origins, however, and indebtedness and the like, are, when great work is concerned, questions for the study and the lecture-room, for the literary historian and the professional critic, rather than for the reader, however intelligent and alert, who wishes to enjoy a masterpiece, and is content simply to enjoy it. It does not really matter how close to anything else something which possesses independent goodness is; the very utmost technical originality, the most spotless purity from the faintest taint of suggestion, will not suffice to confer merit on what does not otherwise possess it. Whether, as I rather think, Fielding pursued the plan he had formed *ab incepto*, or whether he cavalierly neglected it, or whether the current of his own genius carried him off his legs and landed him, half against his will, on the shore of originality, are questions for the Schools, and, as I venture to think, not for the higher forms in them. We have *Joseph Andrews* as it is; and we may be abundantly thankful for it. The contents of it, as of all Fielding's work in this kind, include certain things for which the moderns are scantily grateful. Of late years, and not of late years only, there has grown up a singular and perhaps an ignorant impatience of digressions, of episodes, of tales within a tale. The example of this which has been most maltreated is the "Man of the Hill" episode in *Tom Jones*; but the stories of the "Unfortunate Jilt" and of Mr. Wilson, in our present subject, do not appear to me to be much

less obnoxious to the censure; and *Amelia* contains more than one or two things of the same kind. Me they do not greatly disturb; and I see many defences for them besides the obvious, and at a pinch sufficient one, that divagations of this kind existed in all Fielding's Spanish and French models, that the public of the day expected them, and so forth. This defence is enough, but it is easy to amplify and reëntrench it. It is not by any means the fact that the picaresque novel of adventure is the only or the chief form of fiction which prescribes or admits these episodic excursions. All the classical epics have them; many Eastern and other stories present them; they are common, if not invariable, in the abundant medieval literature of prose and verse romance; they are not unknown by any means in the modern novel; and you will very rarely hear a story told orally at the dinner-table or in the smoking-room without something of the kind. There must, therefore, be something in them corresponding to an inseparable accident of that most unchanging of all things, human nature. And I do not think the special form with which we are here concerned by any means the worst that they have taken. It has the grand and prominent virtue of being at once and easily skippable. There is about Cervantes and Le Sage, about Fielding and Smollett, none of the treachery of the modern novelist, who induces the conscientious reader to drag through pages, chapters, and sometimes volumes which have nothing to do with the action, for fear he should miss something that has to do with it. These great men have a fearless frankness, and almost tell you in so many

words when and what you may skip. Therefore, if the "Curious Impertinent", and the "Baneful Marriage", and the "Man of the Hill", and the "Lady of Quality" get in the way, when you desire to "read for the story", you have nothing to do but turn the page till *finis* comes. The defence has already been made by an illustrious hand for Fielding's inter-chapters and exordiums. It appears to me to be almost more applicable to his insertions.

And so we need not trouble ourselves any more either about the insertions or about the exordiums. They both please me; the second class has pleased persons much better worth pleasing than I can pretend to be; but the making or marring of the book lies elsewhere. I do not think that it lies in the construction, though Fielding's following of the ancients, both sincere and satiric, has imposed a false air of regularity upon that. The Odyssey of Joseph, of Fanny, and of their ghostly mentor and bodily guard is, in truth, a little haphazard, and might have been longer or shorter without any discreet man approving it the more or the less therefor. The real merits lie partly in the abounding humour and satire of the artist's criticism, but even more in the marvellous vivacity and fertility of his creation. For the very first time in English prose fiction every character is alive, every incident is capable of having happened. There are lively touches in the Elizabethan romances; but they are buried in verbiage, swathed in stage costume, choked and fettered by their authors' want of art. The quality of Bunyan's knowledge of men was not much inferior to Shakespeare's,

or at least to Fielding's; but the range and the results of it were cramped by his single theological purpose, and his unvaried allegoric or typical form. Why Defoe did not discover the New World of Fiction, I at least have never been able to put into any brief critical formula that satisfies me, and I have never seen it put by anyone else. He had not only seen it afar off, he had made landings and descents on it; he had carried off and exhibited in triumph natives such as Robinson Crusoe, as Man Friday, as Moll Flanders, as William the Quaker; but he had conquered, subdued, and settled no province therein. I like *Pamela*; I like it better than some persons who admire Richardson on the whole more than I do, seem to like it. But, as in all its author's work, the handling seems to me academic—the working out on paper of an ingeniously conceived problem rather than the observation or evolution of actual or possible life. I should not greatly fear to push the comparison even into foreign countries; but it is well to observe limits. Let us be content with holding that in England at least, without prejudice to anything further, Fielding was the first to display the qualities of the perfect novelist as distinguished from the romancer.

What are those qualities, as shown in *Joseph Andrews*? The faculty of arranging a probable and interesting course of action is one, of course, and Fielding showed it here. But I do not think that it is at any time the greatest one; and nobody denies that he made great advances in this direction later. The faculty of lively dialogue is another; and that he has not often been refused; but much the same may be said of it. The



interspersing of appropriate description is another; but here also we shall not find him exactly a paragon. It is in character—the chief *differentia* of the novel as distinguished not merely from its elder sister the romance, and its cousin the drama, but still more from every other kind of literature—that Fielding stands even here pre-eminent. No one that I can think of, except his greatest successor in the present century, has the same unfailing gift of breathing life into every character he creates or borrows; and even Thackeray draws, if I may use the phrase, his characters more in the flat and less in the round than Fielding. Whether in Blifil he once failed, we must discuss hereafter; he has failed nowhere in *Joseph Andrews*. Some of his sketches may require the caution that they are eighteenth-century men and women; some the warning that they are obviously caricatured, or set in designed profile, or merely sketched. But they are all alive. The finical estimate of Gray (it is a horrid joy to think how perfectly capable Fielding was of having joined in that practical joke of the young gentlemen of Cambridge, which made Gray change his college), while dismissing these light things with patronage, had to admit that “parson Adams is perfectly well, so is Mrs. Slipslop”. “They *were*, Mr. Gray,” said someone once, “they were more perfectly well, and in a higher kind, than anything you ever did; though you were a pretty workman too.”

Yes, parson Adams is perfectly well, and so is Mrs. Slipslop. But so are they all. Even the hero and heroine, tied and bound as they are by the necessity under which

their maker lay of preserving Joseph's Joseph-hood, and of making Fanny the example of a franker and less interested virtue than her sister-in-law that might have been, are surprisingly human where most writers would have made them sticks. And the rest require no allowance. Lady Booby, few as are the strokes given to her, is not much less alive than Lady Bellaston. Mr. Trulliber, monster and not at all delicate monster as he is, is also a man, and when he lays it down that no one even in his own house shall drink when he "caaled vurst", one can but pay his maker the tribute of that silent shudder of admiration which hails the addition of one more everlasting entity to the world of thought and fancy. And Mr. Tow-wouse is real, and Mrs. Tow-wouse is more real still, and Betty is real; and the coachman, and Miss Grave-airs, and all the wonderful crew from first to last. The dresses they wear, the manners they exhibit, the laws they live under, the very foods and drinks they live upon, are "past like the shadows on glasses"—to the comfort and rejoicing of some, to the greater or less sorrow of others. But *they* are there—alive, full of blood, full of breath as we are, and, in truth, I fear a little more so. For some purposes a century is a gap harder to cross and more estranging than a couple of millenniums. But in their case the gap is nothing; and it is not too much to say that as they have stood the harder test, they will stand the easier. There are very striking differences between Nausicaa and Mrs. Slipslop; there are differences not less striking between Mrs. Slipslop and Beatrice. But their likeness is a stranger and more wonderful thing

than any of their unlikenesses. It is that they are all women, that they are all live citizenesses of the Land of Matters Unforgot, the fashion whereof passeth not away, and the franchise whereof, once acquired, assures immortality.

## TOM JONES

The *orbis terrarum* of literary criticism has not had much difficulty in deciding that *Tom Jones* is, in something else than mere size, Fielding's greatest work. If both Johnson and Thackeray seem to have preferred *Amelia*, enough allowance has been made in the General Introduction for any expression of the former, while the latter was evidently biassed at the particular moment. The characteristics of *Amelia* were well suited to contrast with and atone for the rather exaggerated delineation of Fielding's Bohemianism which it had suited Thackeray to give; and, speaking to a mixed audience, he no doubt felt it easier to dwell on the later than on the earlier book. The extreme condemnation of Tom the hero as distinct from *Tom* the book, which is put elsewhere in the mouth of Colonel Newcome, is at least partly dramatic; and I am not sure that the indirect eulogy in *Pendennis*—that *Tom Jones* was the last book in which an English novelist was allowed to depict a man—does not make up for any censure expressed or implied elsewhere. It is, without the grandiloquence, nearly as lofty a eulogy as Gibbon's. What that great writer said is universally known, and no comment on it is necessary, except a reminder that in many

ways Gibbon's tastes were rather Continental or cosmopolitan than English, and that he was by no means likely to be bribed by the intensely national flavour of the novel. Of late there has been a disposition to demur to Coleridge's hardly less lofty eulogy of the mere craftsmanship shown in the novel. But Scott, a practised critic, a novelist of unsurpassed competence, and not always a very enthusiastic encomiast of Fielding, has endorsed it in the introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel*. After such names it is unnecessary to cite any others by way of authority, and we may pass to the direct consideration of the book itself.

*Tom Jones*, then, is a novel which differs from almost all other novels both in the range and the precision of its scale and scheme. Its personages are extremely numerous, and there is justice in the half-humorous protestation of the author, in reference to the apparent repetition in the two landladies, that they are "most carefully differentiated from each other". Its scenes are extremely varied, and each has its local colour adjusted with perfect propriety. Of the actions and passions represented it is indeed possible for the *advocatus diaboli* to urge that, whatever their range and truth to nature within their limits, there is a certain want of height and depth in them. But this is only saying in other words that the middle of the eighteenth century was not the beginning of the sixteenth; that Fielding had not the tragic touch; and that though he was most emphatically a "maker", he was not in the transferred and specialised sense a poet. Lastly, all these varying excellences and excellent variations are adjusted to-

gether in so cunning an arrangement of dramatic narrative, that some have found it absolutely impeccable, while few have done more than protest against the "Man of the Hill", question whether we do not see more than we need of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, and ask whether the catastrophe is not, especially considering the very leisurely movement of the earlier scenes, somewhat hurried and huddled. As for the characters, exception, so far as I know, has not been seriously taken to any save on the score of art and nature to Allworthy and Blifil, on the score of morality to Mr. Jones himself. Some have indeed expressed their desire for something with more air and fire than the heroine; but there are always people who grumble thus. Let us try to sweep the negatives aside before attempting the affirmative.

I have already, speaking of inserted tales, attempted to disable the objection to the "Man of the Hill", and I need say no more on that head except that he, like all his kind, is distinctly a *hors-d'œuvre*, to be taken or left at choice. Nor do the other objections to construction seem to me much more valid. The famous preliminary observations have had extended to them by severe judges the indulgence which I myself claim for the episodes, and while they cannot be said in any way to delay the action, they provide the book with an additional element of interest—an element with which, to the same extent and in the same intensity, no other novel in the world is furnished. As for the end, a certain "quicken-up at the finish" hath invariably been allowed, and even prescribed, to artists, and I do

not know that it can be said to be greatly exceeded here.

It is, however, undeniable that the defects of Allworthy and Blifil appear at this point more than elsewhere, and indeed to some extent produce the effect complained of. And I shall further admit that these two characters, especially Blifil, seem to me almost the only spots in Fielding's sun. For Allworthy we can indeed make some excuse—lame after its kind, for your excuse invariably *claudicat*. There is little doubt that Fielding was hampered and misled by his intention to glorify a particular person, his benefactor Ralph Allen. Nature, when you cannot take liberties with her, is always a clog on Art, and gratitude constrains the licence of the will of men more than malevolence, inasmuch as there is a greater difficulty in disguising particulars. But Allworthy is not so unnatural as he is unsatisfactory; for a very benevolent and very unsuspecting man, whose head was not quite so good as his heart, might act in the way here described. Moreover, his folly and injustice (for his action towards Tom really deserves these words) are not only useful, but almost necessary to the course of the action—a defence rather technical than convincing, but technically good. And here it may be sufficient to say a few words about the effect of Fielding's long practice in drama before he took to fiction. The order has not been usual, for obvious reasons, though the contrary process, the corruption of a good novelist into a dramatist not so good, is, for reasons equally obvious, quite common. But Fielding and Dumas are eminent instances of the happy effect

which dramatic practice exercises on the novelist. Dumas, a better dramatist than Fielding, cannot touch him as a novelist; but, like him, he owes to his dramatic practice the singular freedom of even his most hastily cobbled-up stories from what is really otiose. His playwright's eye kept him from the commonest and worst fault of novel-writing, the introduction of matter irrelevant to the story. But it may be somewhat questioned whether the same playwright's habit did not in Fielding's case induce the fault of being contented, in rare instances, with what *was* necessary for the story.

This operated, I think, even more strongly in the case of Blifil. I do not know that even he can be pronounced wholly unnatural. "A prig, and a bad prig", is not, I fear, an unnatural character in itself. But for this or that reason, Fielding has not made this young wretch alive, as he has made everyone else, great and small, among his personages. He seems almost to have deliberately abstained from doing so. We see very little of Blifil in action; he is generally recounted to us. The "messengers", to use the term familiar to readers of the Greek drama, do his business; the author hangs back to tell his misdeeds; himself is seldom in much evidence on the actual stage. It may be that Fielding could not trust himself with him; that he felt that if he had allowed his figure to appear more actively, something of the dreadful greatness of Jonathan Wild would have passed into Blifil, and have dwarfed and eclipsed the healthier and lighter characters. It may be that he disliked him too much, and shovelled him as quickly as possible out of his hands, as a little later he may have

done with a particularly loathsome rogue at Bow Street. But here again these are weak excuses. If Thackeray has one great advantage over his master, I think it is when we compare Barnes Newcome with Blifil. They are very much alike; indeed, as Mr. Blifil, we are expressly told, "retired to the North", it may possibly have happened that some of his blood was in the veins of that most respectable family. But Barnes is much more human, much completer, much more alive. The late Mr. G. S. Venables, an excellent lawyer and an excellent critic, used, I am told, to remark in connection with some puzzling passages at the end of *Oliver Twist*, that "Dickens hanged Fagin for being the villain of a novel". I am inclined to think that Fielding exacted a more terrible penalty from this his one odious child for the same offence. He deprived him of life to start with.

Nobody can say this of Blifil's brother by the mother's side. "Mr. Thomas" is exceedingly human; and the objections which have been lodged against him have been and must be quite different. With one of them—the anathema launched by Colonel Newcome—there is some slight difficulty in dealing. But the Colonel, though one of the best, was not one of the wisest of men, and he was decidedly weak in history. It might be almost sufficient to say that Scott, the paragon of manly chivalry, and not always a very lenient or sympathetic judge of Fielding, does not seem to have taken any special objection to the Lady Bellaston episode. And I frankly admit that I do not see why he should. In the first place, it must be remembered that the point of



honour which decrees that a man must not under any circumstances accept money from a woman with whom he is on certain terms, is of very modern growth, and is still tempered by the proviso that he may take as much as he likes or can get from his wife. In Fielding's days, or but a very little earlier, this moral had simply not been invented. Marlborough, his father's great commander, notoriously took a large sum from the Duchess of Cleveland in precisely Tom Jones' circumstances; and though Marlborough's enemies included the bitterest and brightest wits of his time, they seem to have objected, when they objected at all, rather to his careful investment of this money than to his acceptance of it. No easy-going gentleman of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in France or England—and it must be remembered that to compare Tom Jones with the grave and precise ones is absurd—would have thought the worse of himself for accepting a present of money from his mistress, any more than he would have thought the worse of her for accepting one from him. During Tom's youth not a few of the finest gentlemen in Europe found a Lady Bellaston in the Czarina Elizabeth, and during his age many more found one in the Czarina Catherine. I have myself a great admiration for nice points of honour—I don't think you can make them too nice or too fine; but the person who has not been taught them—nay, in whose time they scarcely exist—cannot justly be said to violate them. It seemed perfectly natural to Tom that, when he had money, he should dress out Molly Seagrim, who had none: I do not suppose that it

seemed much less natural to him that Lady Bellaston should dress him out when she had money and he had none. A shocking blindness, doubtless; but all blindness is more or less relative.

The more general objections to Mr. Thomas's character seem to me to proceed from one of the commonest but most uncritical faults of criticism—the refusal to consider what it is that the author intended to give us. It is most certain that Fielding did not intend to give us an Æneas or an Amadis, a Galahad or an Artegall. He meant to give us an extremely ordinary young man in all respects except good luck, good looks, fair understanding, and generous impulses—a young man incapable of doing anything cruel, or, as far as he understood it, mean, but of no very exceptional abilities, rather thoughtless, fond of pleasure, and not extraordinarily nice about its sources and circumstances—a *jeune homme sensuel moyen*, in short. His concessions to heroic needs consisted in making Tom not only—

Like Paris handsome, and like Hector brave,

but a much better fellow than Paris and a much luckier one than Hector.

It seems to me that we have absolutely no business to go beyond these limits and insist that Tom shall be a Joseph or even a Percivale; still less to demand that he shall be a young man of literary and artistic sympathies; least of all that he shall be troubled about his soul either in the manner of Launcelot Smith or in the manner of Francis Neyrac. The late Mr. Kingsley was, and the living M. Bourget is, a very clever man. To

them too, especially to the first, fell something of the faculty of creative observation, and neither mixes with it more ephemeral matter than he had a right to mix. But if, when the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are to some future generation what the first before and the first after Christ are to us, some competent critic turns out of a new Herculaneum or Pompeii a box containing *Tom Jones*, *Yeast*, and *La Terre Promise*, I know what his verdict will be.

A very little of the same injustice which has thus weighed upon Tom has involved the divine Sophia; but with this we need hardly concern ourselves at all. It is not necessary that she should be our ideal, or anyone's ideal. But if anyone has read and digested the great and famous first chapter of the Sixth Book, which, if not exactly exhaustive of its difficult subject, contains more practical wisdom than the *Phaedrus* and more honest passion than all Stendhal's treatise *De l'Amour*, he will admit that she was a worthy object of the feelings it discusses. Perhaps Mr. Jones was not quite worthy of her; it is not the least of her own worthinesses that the fact is extremely unlikely ever to have occurred to her.

For all the rest we have few vituperators. I think indeed with Scott, rather than with my friend Mr. Dobson, that Squire Western ought not to have taken that beating from the Captain; but then I own myself, as Scott probably was, jealous for the honour of the Tory party, to which Mr. Western also belonged. Nobody else is "out" for a moment during the whole of this long and delightful story. Everybody does what he or she ought to have done—I do not mean morally,

which might subject me to the censures of the Church and the Schools alike, but according to the probabilities of human nature and the requirements of great art. Fielding cannot introduce the most insignificant character who makes a substantial appearance, without finishing the drawing; he cannot send on the merest scene-shifters, the veriest candle-snuffers, and "population of Cyprus", without impressing upon them natural and distinct personalities. As you turn the pages, the long silent world becomes alive again in all its varied scenes, very much as the old coachyard did when the Bagman's Uncle took that walk from Edinburgh to Leith after supper. The whole thing is perfectly real, and real without effort. Indeed, this extraordinary vitality belongs to the minor characters in almost a greater degree than to the major. There is Miss Western, with her perpetual and yet not the least overdone politics; and her niece Mrs. Fitzpatrick—very ripe and real she; and Mrs. Waters, for whom she was mistaken, and who was mistaken for her and also for other people; and Partridge the immortal; and the pair of named hand-maidens, Deborah and Honour, who come only short of Mrs. Slipslop; and the pair of unnamed landladies; and their chambermaids, who if they are not always virtuous or beautiful, possess that charm which an old poet thought the highest, that they "never will say no", and are generally good-natured and charitable souls. There is no mistake about Lady Bellaston, and not much about Lord Fellamar. But no possible space could suffice for this sort of talk. Let it be enough to add to the old and well-deserved

praise of the "fresh air" and healthy atmosphere of the whole piece, that these effects, so often acknowledged, are due first of all to the vitality of which we have been speaking. *Tom Jones* is an epic of life—not indeed of the highest, the rarest, the most impassioned of life's scenes and phases, but of the healthy average life of the average natural man; not faultless nor perfect by any means, but human and actual as no one else but Shakespeare has shown him in the mimic world.

## AMELIA

Fielding's third great novel has been the subject of much more discordant judgments than either of its forerunners. If we take the period since its appearance as covering some five generations, we find the greatest authority in the earliest, Johnson, speaking of it with something more nearly approaching to enthusiasm than he allowed himself in reference to any other work of an author to whom he was, on the whole, so unjust. The greatest man of letters of the next generation, Scott (whose attitude to Fielding was rather undecided, and seems to speak a mixture of intellectual admiration and moral dislike, or at least failure in sympathy), pronounces it "on the whole unpleasing", and regards it chiefly as a sequel to *Tom Jones*, showing what is to be expected of a libertine and thoughtless husband. But he, too, is enthusiastic over the heroine. Thackeray (whom in this special connection at any rate it is

scarcely too much to call the greatest man of the third generation) overflows with predilection for it, but chiefly, as it would seem, because of his affection for *Amelia* herself, in which he practically agrees with Scott and Johnson. It would be invidious, and is no-ways needful, to single out any critic of our own time to place beside these great men. But for the later nineteenth century we could not do better than take Mr. Austin Dobson and Sir Edmund Gosse, who both lived well into the twentieth, and were both special students of the eighteenth. The first found things in *Amelia* unsatisfactory; the second, if with evident consciousness of temerity, ventures to ask whether it is not "a little dull". The very absence of episodes (on the ground that Miss Matthews's story is too closely connected with the main action to be fairly called an episode) and of introductory dissertations has been brought against it, as the presence of these things was brought against its forerunners.

I have sometimes wondered whether *Amelia* pays the penalty of an audacity which, *à priori*, its most unfavourable critics would indignantly deny to be a fault. It begins instead of ending with the marriage-bells; and though critic after critic of novels has exhausted his indignation and his satire over the folly of insisting on these as a finale, I doubt whether the demand is not too deeply rooted in the English, nay, in the human mind, to be safely neglected. The essence of all romance is a quest; the quest most perennially and universally interesting to man is the quest of a wife or a mistress; and the chapters dealing with what comes

later have an inevitable flavour of tameness, and of the day after the feast. It is not common nowadays to meet anybody who thinks Tommy Moore a great poet; one has to encounter either a suspicion of Philistinism or a suspicion of paradox if one tries to vindicate for him even his due place in the poetical hierarchy. Yet I suspect that no poet ever put into words a more universal criticism of life than he did when he wrote "I saw from the beach", with its moral of:

Give me back, give me back, the wild freshness of  
morning—

Her smiles and her tears are worth evening's best light.

If we discard this fallacy boldly, and ask ourselves whether *Amelia* is or is not as good as *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones*, we shall, I think, be inclined to answer rather in the affirmative than in the negative. It is perhaps a little more easy to find fault with its characters than with theirs; or rather, though no one of these characters has the defects of Blifil or of Allworthy, it is easy to say that no one of them has the charm of the best personages of the earlier books. The idolaters of *Amelia* would of course exclaim at this sentence as it regards that amiable lady; and I am myself by no means disposed to rank amiability low in the scale of things excellent in woman. But though she is by no means what her namesake and spiritual granddaughter, Miss Sedley, must, I fear, be pronounced to be, an amiable fool, there is really too much of the milk of human kindness, unrefreshed and unrelieved of its mawkishness by the rum or whisky of human frailty, in her.

One could have better pardoned her forgiveness of her husband if she had in the first place been a little more conscious of what there was to forgive; and in the second, a little more romantic in her attachment to him. As it is, he was *son homme*; he was handsome; he had broad shoulders; he had a sweet temper; he was the father of her children, and that was enough. At least we are allowed to see in Mr. Booth no qualities other than these, and in her no imagination even of any other qualities. To put what I mean out of reach of cavil, compare Imogen and Amelia, and the difference will be felt.

But Fielding was a prose writer, writing in London in the eighteenth century, while Shakespeare was a poet writing in all time and all space, so that the comparison is luminous in more ways than one. I do not think that in the special scheme which the novelist set himself here he can be accused of any failure. The life is as vivid as ever; the minor sketches may be even called a little more vivid. Dr. Harrison is not perfect. I do not mean that he has ethical faults, for that is a merit, not a defect; but he is not quite perfect in art. His alternate persecution and patronage of Booth, though useful to the story, repeat the earlier fault of Allworthy, and are something of a blot. But he is individually much more natural than Allworthy, and indeed is something like what Dr. Johnson would have been if he had been rather better bred, less crotchety, and blessed with more health. Miss Matthews in her earlier scenes has touches of greatness which a thousand French novelists lavishing "candour" and reckless of exaggeration have not



equalled; and I believe that Fielding kept her at a distance during the later scenes of the story, because he could not trust himself not to make her more interesting than Amelia. Of the peers, more wicked and less wicked, there is indeed not much good to be said. The peer of the eighteenth-century writers (even when, as in Fielding's case, there was no reason why they should "mention him with *Hor*", as Policeman X has it) is almost always a faint type of goodness or wickedness dressed out with stars and ribbons and coaches-and-six. Only Swift, by combination of experience and genius, has given us live lords, in Lord Sparkish and Lord Smart. But Mrs. Ellison and Mrs. Atkinson are very women; and the serjeant, though the touch of "sensibility" is on him, is excellent; and Dr. Harrison's country friend and his prig of a son are capital; and Bondum, and "the author", and Robinson, and all the minor characters, are as good as they can be.

It is, however, usual to detect a lack of vivacity in the book, an evidence of declining health and years. It may be so; it is at least certain that Fielding, during the composition of *Amelia*, had much less time to bestow upon elaborating his work than he had previously had, and that his health was breaking. But are we perfectly sure that if the chronological order had been different we should have pronounced the same verdict? Had *Amelia* come between *Joseph* and *Tom*, how many of us might have committed ourselves to some such sentence as this: "In *Amelia* we see the youthful exuberances of *Joseph Andrews* corrected by a higher art; the adjustment of plot and character arranged with a fuller crafts-

manship; the genius which was to find its fullest exemplification in *Tom Jones* already displaying maturity"? And do we not too often forget that a very short time—in fact, barely three years—passed between the appearance of *Tom Jones* and the appearance of *Amelia*? that although we do not know how long the earlier work had been in preparation, it is extremely improbable that a man of Fielding's temperament, of his wants, of his known habits and history, would have kept it when once finished long in his desk? and that consequently between some scenes of *Tom Jones* and some scenes of *Amelia* it is not improbable that there was no more than a few months' interval? I do not urge these things in mitigation of any unfavourable judgment against the later novel. I only ask—How much of that unfavourable judgment ought in justice to be set down to the fallacies connected with an imperfect appreciation of facts?

To me it is not so much a question of deciding whether I like *Amelia* less, and if so, how much less, than the others, as a question what part of the general conception of this great writer it supplies? I do not think that we could fully understand Fielding without it; I do not think that we could derive the full quantity of pleasure from him without it. The exuberant romantic faculty of *Joseph Andrews* and its pleasant satire; the mighty craftsmanship and the vast science of life of *Tom Jones*; the ineffable irony and logical grasp of *Jonathan Wild*, might have left us with a slight sense of hardness, a vague desire for unction, if it had not been for this completion of the picture. We should not have known (for in the other books, with the possible

exception of Mrs. Fitzpatrick, the characters are a little too determinately goats and sheep) how Fielding could draw *nuances*, how he could project a mixed personage on the screen, if we had not had Miss Matthews and Mrs. Atkinson—the last especially a figure full of the finest strokes, and, as a rule, insufficiently done justice to by critics.

And I have purposely left to the last a group of personages about whom indeed there has been little question, but who are among the triumphs of Fielding's art—the two Colonels and their connecting link, the wife of the one and the sister of the other. Colonel Bath has necessarily united all suffrages. He is of course a very little stagey; he reminds us that his author had had a long theatrical apprenticeship: he is something too much *d'une pièce*. But as a study of the brave man who is almost more braggart than brave, of the generous man who will sacrifice not only generosity but bare justice to "a hogo of honour", he is admirable, and up to his time almost unique. Ordinary writers and ordinary readers have never been quite content to admit that bravery and braggadocio can go together, that the man of honour may be a selfish pedant. People have been unwilling to tell and to hear the whole truth even about Wolfe and Nelson, who were both favourable specimens of the type; but Fielding the infallible saw that type in its quiddity, and knew it, and registered it for ever.

Less amusing but more delicately faithful and true are Colonel James and his wife. They are both very good sort of people in a way, who live in a lax and

frivolous age, who have plenty of money, no particular principle, no strong affection for each other, and little individual character. They might have been—Mrs. James to some extent is—quite estimable and harmless; but even as it is, they are not to be wholly ill spoken of. Being what they are, Fielding has taken them, and, with a relentlessness which Swift could hardly have exceeded and a good-nature which Swift rarely or never attained, has held them up to us as dissected preparations of half-innocent meanness, scoundrelism, and vanity, such as are hardly anywhere else to be found.

I have used the word “preparations”, and it in part indicates Fielding’s virtue, a virtue shown, I think, in this book as much as anywhere. But it does not fully indicate it; for the preparation, wet or dry, is a dead thing, and a museum is but a mortuary. Fielding’s men and women, once more let it be said, are all alive. The palace of his work is the hall, not of Eblis, but of a quite beneficent enchanter, who puts burning hearts into his subjects, not to torture them, but only that they may light up for us their whole organisation and being. They are not in the least the worse for it, and we are infinitely the better.

## JONATHAN WILD

Fielding has written no greater book than *Jonathan Wild*, although there can be no doubt that of all his books, which in form and style court at once popularity and the critical verdict, this has been the least general

favourite. Appearing as it first did in a collection of *Miscellanies*, before the author had achieved much general approbation, and conjoined with work on the whole inferior, it attracted little attention. It is to be feared that that verdict of "low", which (as we know from divers rather uneasy girds of the author) was levelled at not a little of his work, concerned it more particularly. But this could not long have kept it down. The audacity of its realism may have been a more genuine motive; but I suspect that even this is not the true reason, which may be reached anon. For the moment it is sufficient to say that it has had some hearty condemnation, much silent omission, and little enthusiastic praise. Hazlitt, the least superfine of critics, passes it over in his remarks on Fielding in the *English Comic Writers*. Scott, though he could not and did not miss some of its excellences, more nearly approaches to the purely unappreciative and unjust in his notice of it than anywhere else in the wide range of his admirable and too little appreciated critical studies. Thackeray, who should have enjoyed it to the full, may be said, using the vernacular, to "shy" at it. Even Austin Dobson, who evidently delights in and as evidently understands it, passes it over with a kind of word to the wise. And indeed it may be contended that any words to any other than the wise about *Jonathan Wild* are useless enough.

Yet, as I said, Fielding has written nothing greater. It is his *Tale of a Tub*; and though he was not quite so mighty a man as Swift, and had the additional disadvantage of coming after him, I should rank it only

second in its own class to that dazzling and blinding masterpiece, and superior to it in a certain unity and completeness, which no doubt depend in part on its much lower aim. It is, save for the character of Heart-free, compact of almost pure irony. And nothing can be more certain than that pure irony is relished with a genuine and unaffected relish only by a very small number of persons. To those who do relish it, there is nothing quite so delicious. Not only does the special taste of it never pall, but, unlike other special tastes, it communicates to the whole of life a flavour, now of consolation, now of heightening. To the most poignant individual enjoyments of sense or intellect, to the most genuine admiration of beauty or sublimity in the persons, the actions, the works of others, it contributes that reflex sense of the other side, of the drawback, of the end, which is required to save passion from fatuity and rapture from cloying. Disappointment, ill-success, sorrow in personal experience, disgust, contempt, indignation in regarding the works and the ways, public and private, of others, it consoles and sweetens with the other sense of compensation, of comprehension, of the *revanche*. But it is an unusual, and it may be an unhappy, temperament that can always adjust itself to the ironic view. For that view necessitates on one side a certain mystical faith; on another, a readiness to laugh at oneself, the acutest if not the wholesomest of pleasures; on yet another, an extreme tolerance; on another still, an immense pessimism. No one who has not said to himself, when he has just indulged in an expansion of heart or pen, "You idiot!"; no one who,

when he has met with a disappointment or an injustice, has not said to himself, "The fools were right after all"; no one who does not feel that if he ever swayed an audience as speaker or actor, obtained a striking success with a book, or in other ways attained greatness, his first reflection would be "O sancta simplicitas!" can thoroughly enjoy *Jonathan Wild*. And whether it is worth going through so much, etc., to borrow a famous phrase, everyone must decide for himself.

I at least have no doubt that the book is a very great book. It has been described as "the evolution of a purely intellectual conception". But I think we must add that the purely intellectual conception here puts on robes of fleshly and vital execution. To say that Jonathan is the inferior of Iago, is to say by implication that he is the superior of everyone else in his class. Either in different circumstances might have been quite other than a villain. I do not know that any third character of fiction can be named who, being during the time of his persentment a villain pure and simple, is yet made a prefectly human creature. And they are all human creatures, even Heartfree, who is a kind of idiot. They always keep time and tune. Jonathan is truly "great"; not least great perhaps in those slips and miscalculations which achieve his humanity. But his worthy spouse is not less great than he. I have never desired the more intimate acquaintance of Miss Lætitia, but at a distance I have always admired her infinitely. From her first appearance to that antepenultimate scene in which she makes the immortal protest against being described in terms too unmannerly no doubt, but also far too

accurate, she is consistent with herself—she is alive, she is perfect. Shakespeare would have drawn her as she is, had he cared to draw her at all; he would have admitted her as sister of Doll Tearsheet (with worse blood in her than Doll's) as she is. And Miss Doshy, her sister in the flesh, with that saving grace of devotion to stocking-mending which, as we feel beforehand, will land her, a quasi-industrious she-apprentice, in the comparatively good end of making a tolerable wife to a person in Virginia! And Count la Ruse, who is so exceedingly ingenious in bubbling others, that he never thinks of being bubbled himself! And Mr. Bagshot, overcrowded by the superior greatness of Wild! And Miss Straddle, who is drawn merely or chiefly in outline, but who is worthy to rank with the divine Tishy! And Mr. Fireblood and Mr. Blueskin, those greater Bagshots and only inferior Wilds! And Mr. Roger Johnson, that democratic but unsuccessful leader! And last, but almost greatest, the ordinary, whose preference for punch as "a liquor nowhere spoken against in the Scriptures" has conciliated to him even unfriendly minds, but who is constant to himself throughout! The least of these would have had vitality enough to keep any book from putrefaction; how magnificent must be the life of that which contains them all!

We shall never consider *Jonathan Wild* aright, nor do justice to it, unless we take in conjunction the two qualities just named, its irony and its truth to life. It is in the combination of them that it is almost unique. This combination, and the manner in which it is shown, distinguish Fielding in more places than this,



and this phase of Fielding especially from almost every other writer. Except in the *Polite Conversation*, which he did not choose to couch, or did not think of couching, in simple narrative form, Swift adopts styles which, despite his absolute veracity, remove the appearance of his greatest work from real life. Defoe, a master of realism, was only unconsciously and indirectly an ironist at all. Voltaire always had a purpose, and was lacking in greatness. Lucian had the defect of Swift. And when we come to the modern realists who have chosen similar subjects, we find a total want of irony and of intellectual characteristics generally, together with a boring quality, to which Fielding would never have attained. The characters of *Jonathan Wild* are not morally much better than the characters of *La Terre* or *Germinal*, or *Nana* or *La Bête Humaine*; but they have, as positive advantages, ten times the life, bodies instead of sawdust, flesh instead of leather, with or without prunella; and as negative advantages, a total absence of stupid ephemeral theory about heredity and lesion, and Heaven knows what else. No doubt Zola has glimmerings; when Nana complained that "*ça ne finissait pas*", she came near to Lætitia. But these occasions are rare, and even if they were less rare, the Frenchman lacks utterly, can never and does never attain unto, the Olympian serenity of irony with which Fielding looks down on his creations.

But after all, it may be said here more than in most cases, "What is the good of talking?" *Jonathan Wild* more than almost any book, certainly more than any other of its author's, is one of those which must find

fit readers or none. You cannot argue anybody into liking it who is not naturally prepared to do so; all the argument and all the authority in the world will not prevent a person who is naturally inclined to love irony from flying to the book and cleaving to it. One good friend of mine, for instance, who is also a good critic, thinks it a "strain upon the nerves", though he fully sees its greatness, and is of opinion that "no one would go to it for mere amusement". It is to me one of the few thoroughly amusing books I know; a book to which for thirty years I have gone for rest and refreshment. The "lords of human kind" will in a more evil sense than Goldsmith's have "passed by" when there are none left among them to take delight in the masterful and masterly supremacy over the lower side of the nature of man which *Jonathan Wild* shows.

1893 (*revised*)

# SMOLLETT

## INTRODUCTION

TOBIAS GEORGE SMOLLETT, the youngest in age and the last to die, though not the latest to publish, of the four great English novelists of the mid-eighteenth century, was born in 1721. He was thus Richardson's junior by more than thirty years, Fielding's by fourteen, and Sterne's by eight; though his first book, *Roderick Random*, anticipated Sterne's first by nearly twenty, and was only preceded by the first enterprise in each case of Fielding and of Richardson. His birth and extraction were good, his father, Archibald Smollett, being the fourth son of Sir James Smollett of Bonhill, who besides being a judge of the Commissary Court, a member of Parliament, and a commissioner of the Union, was the head of a very respectable family. The novelist, however, could hardly be said to be born to fortune, though, as it happened, had he lived but four years longer than he did he would have inherited his grandfather's estate and family position. Not only had Sir James three sons older than Archibald, not only had Tobias an elder brother and an elder sister, but the marriage of his father with Barbara Cunningham was against Sir James's will. And though the judge did not exactly drive his son out of doors, he held him in no favour, and

gave him next to no portion, save the tenancy of the small farm of Dalquhurn, where Tobias was born.

The biographers of Smollett were for a long time occupied in establishing, and have for a long time since been occupied in demolishing, the theory of the autobiographic character of the novel now presented afresh to the reader. A wise criticism has probably at no time had much difficulty in perceiving that the feelings certain to be excited in a hot and not altogether amiable temperament by a position of dependence, and the individual peculiarities of Smollett's genius, on which more will be said presently, justify a certain parallelism between the experiences of Roderick and Tobias; but that what Tobias says against the relations of Roderick is by no means evidence against the relations of Tobias. The latter, at any rate, was very early left an orphan, but was not deprived of a good share of the education which then fell to all Scotch boys of any means and kin, and to most who had neither. He was apprenticed—or, as our more pretentious days would say, articled—to a medical man of Glasgow, Mr. John Gordon, whom posterity wilfully insists on identifying with the Potion of the novel, although Gordon has been proved by the clearest evidence to have been of an entirely different order of practitioner. Whatever he was, he was lucky in his apprentices as far as brains went; for he afterwards had, first for apprentice and then for partner, Dr. John Moore, father of Sir John Moore, author of *Zeluco* and a famous account of Paris under the Revolution, and a friend and biographer of Smollett himself.

If, however, the earlier apprentice was in literature to do far better work than Moore's (which is itself much better than the average), he was not, like Moore, destined to be successful in his original profession. Tradition, calling in the novel as before to its aid, but asserting itself to possess authority independent of the novel, will have it that he was anything but an industrious or toward apprentice. It is certain that in 1739, being then just eighteen, he set out for London with an exceedingly bad tragedy, *The Regicide*, and some letters of recommendation to friends of the family, in his pocket. The tragedy came, of course, to naught; the letters of recommendation are supposed, rather than known, to have helped in obtaining for Smollett the place of surgeon's mate in one of the ships (it is not known which) of the Cartagena expedition in October 1740. Of this ghastly business he has left two accounts—one pretty fresh in date, if fantastic, in *Roderick Random* itself, another much later in a formal "Account of the Siege". It is scarcely surprising that he was satisfied with this experience of "the English Navy at its very lowest point", as Mr. Hannay, Smollett's latest biographer, and one of the most competent living students of naval history, has put it.

Nobody quite knows what Smollett did in Jamaica, where he certainly resided till 1744, before which date he certainly courted Anne Lascelles, a local heiress; and in or about 1747 he married her. In May 1744 he had returned to England and taken a house in Downing Street, not yet wholly ministerial. We hear something of him during the '45, which, though he was

at this time rather a Whig than a Tory, drew from him his best piece of verse, "Mourn, hapless Caledonia, mourn". Next year he published two bad satires, *Advice* and *Reproof*, and wrote the libretto of an opera, *Alceste*, which had no better luck than *The Regicide*, though its chances seemed at first fairer. Yet another year, and he and his wife were certainly living together in London; and after yet another still, in January 1748, *Roderick Random* was published.

Postponing, as is usual and almost necessary, criticism in detail on this his first work in his proper vocation—except the observations that it was very successful, and was mistaken by some for a new book of Fielding's—we may continue the account of Smollett's life. He was encouraged by his success to print *The Regicide*, with a very ill-tempered preface reflecting on Lyttelton, his ineffectual patron, and Garrick, his unreceptive manager. He was better advised in setting to work on another novel, the matter of which he drew, according to his custom, to no small extent from his personal experiences in a trip to Paris, where he saw, and marked down as victims the poet-physician Akenside and the original of Pallet the painter. This trip took place in 1750; in the same year Smollett became M.D. of Marischal College, Aberdeen, and is said to have set up, or tried to set up, for a time in practice at Bath.

*Peregrine Pickle* was published in 1751, and its success far exceeded that of *Roderick Random*, being indeed of a threefold kind—a success of merit due to its really masterly excellences, a success of scandal due to the extreme licence of expression, both in loose

detail and in personal lampoon (which was in both respects much corrected in the second and standard edition), and a third success of, as it seems, perennial sureness with a great part of mankind, though to a small part it is almost incomprehensible. The "Memoirs of a Lady of Quality", which form an excrescence on the book, not justified even by the large licence of digression and episode then prevailing, are the actual or slightly embroidered experiences<sup>1</sup> of Lady Vane, a real personage of some beauty, no morals, and considerable means, who, it is said, paid Smollett for inserting them. This is the only really discreditable transaction, except a few extravagances of his morose and irritable temperament, that is charged against him.

Next year (1752), Smollett established himself in a house in Lawrence Street, Chelsea, which was his headquarters for the twenty remaining years of his life; and in yet another year his third novel, *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, made its appearance. It was the last for some considerable time, though Smollett by no means gave up the pen. On the contrary, from this time forwards, he became something like a writer of all work, though he was never a mere hack. Indeed, there are few or no signs of pecuniary straits about his life, so that either his wife's fortune, which is traditionally supposed to have "disappeared in law-suits", must have lasted better than tradition has it, or he must have had other sources of income. Tradition,

<sup>1</sup> [Recent writers discuss the extent of Smollett's own contribution to these memoirs.—*Ed.*]

moreover, is certainly wrong to some extent, for he himself, as late as 1763, speaks of his "comfortable estate" in Jamaica. But, from the date of *Fathom*, for a full decade onwards, he was in the main a very busy journalist, compiler, and miscellany-writer. He was, indeed, one of not a few instances—his countryman Dr. John Campbell is another, and it is pretty clear that Johnson himself, but for his extreme indolence, might have been a third—that the popular notion of the middle of the eighteenth century as a time when the journalist and miscellanist was condemned of necessity to garrets and cookshops, is exaggerated. The first work of the kind which Smollett undertook was a new translation of *Don Quixote*. His competence for the task was questioned even at the time, and it has been more than once insinuated that he either did not know Spanish or did not write the translation himself. But Mr. Hannay, who again speaks as an expert, sees no reason to dispute his knowledge of the language, and justly points out that the faults of the translation are not so much mistakes in the author's meaning as a wilful determination to paraphrase and embellish and touch up—a theory of translation which had been stoutly championed by Dryden, and which was still the prevailing one in England.

Smollett, however, was to take higher degrees in miscellaneous literature than the comparatively humble one of translator. After a visit to Scotland (for the first time since he had left it fourteen years earlier as a raw boy), he became editor of the *Critical Review*, a periodical which for the last half of the century divided



with the *Monthly Review* the function of administering proper discipline to new books, till the decadence of both encouraged the appearance of the *Edinburgh*. His natural quarrelsomeness had already found vent in a complicated dissension, not merely with a person named Peter Gordon, whom Smollett thrashed, and who brought an action against Smollett, but with Gordon's counsel, Home Campbell. The matter would be of no interest if it did not show pretty distinctly what the novels had already disclosed to some extent—the extreme irritability and pugnacity of Smollett's character. These qualities were not likely either to be much amended or to rust for want of occasion in literary and political journalism. He had already (and without, so far as is known, any provocation, save that Lyttelton was Fielding's patron and that Fielding was a successful novelist older than himself) made an offensive allusion to the author of *Tom Jones* in the first edition of *Peregrine Pickle*; and he was no sooner established in the chair of the *Critical* than he plunged into one kettle of hot water after another. His merely literary quarrels require no notice, but his brush with Admiral Knowles had serious consequences. The admiral, his conduct having been unfavourably criticised, resented the criticism with a heat which did not show much wisdom, and, in a manner which did not show much courage, brought it before the courts, and obtained a sentence of fine and imprisonment against Smollett. This imprisonment (which then, as later, in the case of persons who could pay, merely meant confinement to a rather expensive and inconvenient lodging, with no other hardship or

interference with business or pleasure) was worked out in 1759.

Meanwhile he had partly edited, partly written, a *Compendium of Voyages* in seven volumes, which included the *Account of the Expedition to Carthagera*, and had produced the farce of *The Reprisals*, which, unlike his former dramatic attempts, was acted, and was not unsuccessful. In it Smollett once more drew on his tars, and with fair success.

But the most important piece of "hack-work" that he was to do was begun in 1758 in the shape of the *History of England*, which he first brought down to within ten years of that date, and afterwards continued in a form more commonly met in company with Hume's earlier survey than with its author's own. This was not in any way a contemptible piece of work. Smollett's studies, indeed, had not very specially prepared him for it; and though he, of course, did not even attempt any original research, while he wrote long before that research had been done ready to his hand, still it was well planned and very well written. It was also very well paid; for he received in all £2000 for it, and it is said not to have occupied him more than fourteen months, though his health is also said never to have recovered the strain. In an edition of Smollett's novels, it cannot be necessary to say very much about this *History*, which is now obtainable at the book shops, I think, at a cheaper rate than anything equally well written, equally well printed, and of equal bulk. It belongs to a class of history which, as a class, is by no means obsolete even now, though it is not, in my judg-

ment, nearly so well done as a rule, and is perhaps not often done on quite such a scale. This is the kind of history which is in fact a long leading article of the more instructive kind, written with fair knowledge, in a popular but not unscholarly style, by a man who is content to give his public just as much detail and just as strict criticism as that public cares for, but not a jot more. Such things have to be done, and from the very terms of their doing they have to be re-done from time to time. But when they are done as well as Smollett did them they are not disagreeable, while, even if worse done, they are often useful *points de repère*--not as store-houses of historical fact as to their subjects, but as instances of the temper, the views, the requirements, the general atmosphere of their own day.

Then once more, after a seven years' interval, Smollett began, as his day would have said, to court the Muse of Fiction. It was not a courtship wholly successful in its result, which was the eccentrically and injudiciously planned *Sir Launcelot Greaves*; but the book was noteworthy, because it appeared in parts distributed over several numbers of the *British Magazine*. This is sometimes said to be the first instance of a practice afterwards more and more popular; but it would require a very long ransacking of the dustiest of dustbins to be quite certain of this.<sup>1</sup> The book appeared in 1760-61, and 1762 saw yet another venture less successful still. Either before or during the com-

<sup>1</sup>For instance, *Robinson Crusoe*, forty years earlier, appeared thus; but it seems not till six months after its publication in book-form.

position of his *History*, Smollett had changed from a Revolution Whig of Conservative principles to a very decided Tory; and the politics of the *Critical Review* were also of that complexion. This was not, however, in theory a political paper; *The Briton*, which, at the desire and expense of Bute, Smollett started as a weekly in 1762, was uncompromisingly political and partisan. It is chiefly remembered because of the opposition print, the famous *North Briton*, which Wilkes (who in private was a friend of Smollett's) launched against it, and which (Bute flinching either from the obloquy or the expense) was enabled to triumph over it. It did not last a year, and the stoppage greatly mortified Smollett's pride. In 1763, his only daughter and child Elizabeth died at the age of fifteen, and the coincidence of these things with the results of the overwork on the *History*, determined him to go abroad. Before he went, however, or in the year of his departure, he edited (or, to speak more plainly, fathered) a translation of Voltaire and a sort of popular statistical work called *The Present State of all Nations*.

He travelled through or resided in France and Italy between 1763 and 1766, his longest residence being at Nice; and when he came back, in the year last named, he published his *Travels*. The book was the subject of a famous gibe or two from Sterne, and has been pretty generally condemned, either with faint praise or positive censure. I think rather better of it than most of its critics seem to have thought. It is excessively ill-tempered; it tells us a great deal more about the writer's ill-health than we care to hear; the prejudice

against the ways and manners of foreigners, though amusing at first, grows monotonous. But Smollett was one of the keenest of observers, and one of the most forcible of writers; and though he was no doubt something of a Philistine in taste, we have had so much art-gush lately that his Philistinism is not wholly disgusting. And the book is a real view of the state of that part of Europe which it concerns—not a Sentimental Journey by any means, but also not a mere collection of statistics.

Some temporary but little permanent benefit resulted from Smollett's stay on the Continent. His youth had been one of some hardship. He had evidently inherited one of those constitutions which the hard living of our ancestors did not improve; and it is quite possible (although I doubt very much whether the severest literary work ever injured a sound man) that the heavy labour of his fourth and fifth decades may have sealed his fate. His mother died soon after he came back, and he was with her at the last. He was a good deal at Bath; and though he did not leave England again for another three years, he seems to have been much on the move and (for him) little at work. A fresh edition of the *Present State* gave him some occupation, and indeed was not finished till after he had left England for the last time; but his only independent publication during these years was the *Adventures of an Atom*, which, after some consideration, it has been decided not to include in the present edition. It is fictitious in form, but in nothing else, being, under the guise of a Japanese romance, a ferocious, and, from Smollett's point of

view, a pretty close, satire on the recent political history of England. Newcastle, Pitt, and even Bute himself, are indiscriminately subjected to treatment which must have excited in more than one reader a qualmish remembrance of the way in which the Yahoos treated Gulliver. To be barely intelligible to any but students of the history of the time, the thing would require a commentary nearly as full as the text; and its substance, though by no means devoid of savage vigour and here and there of just reprehension, is as much lacking in interest as in decency. Soon after its publication, Smollett returned to Italy, and after some short stay at Lucca and Pisa, established himself near Leghorn, where two years later he died, and was buried on October 21, 1771. He had already published his last and by far his best work, *Humphry Clinker*, and his last days owed much to the kindness of Armstrong—like Akenside, a poet-physician, and if not quite such a good poet as Akenside, much less of a prig.

It will be observed by those who compare the two biographies that there is a very curious similarity (dwelt upon already by Scott and others, but not to be missed here) between our knowledge of Fielding and our knowledge of Smollett. Both were men of good family, who experienced but little of the good fortune which in the eighteenth century family connections still as a rule brought with them. Both married for love wives of beauty and fortune, of whom we have hardly the faintest personal details. Neither has left any body of letters, though Smollett's are not quite so rare as Fielding's. Each has left a piece of autobiography describing the

discomforts of travel, and the sufferings that attend the decline of life. In both cases (though again rather less in Smollett's than in Fielding's) the notices of contemporaries are scanty and uninforming. Both had learned professions which did them little good, though Law was, latterly at least, rather kinder to Fielding than Medicine ever was to Smollett. Both were driven to novel-writing by their genius, and to other literary or quasi-literary employments by want or accident. Both died in foreign countries, and at very nearly the same age, though Smollett was a little the older.

There follows almost necessarily, from some, if not from most of these similarities, another—that we are driven to construct not merely our literary but our personal ideas of the two men in the main from their works. The personal idea of Smollett thus obtained, even if we take the greatest possible trouble not to give too much weight to what may be merely dramatic presentment, is even more distinct than that of Fielding. But it cannot be said that it is anything like so favourable. *Fier comme un Ecossais* is no uncomplimentary proverb in the mouth of a nation which once had abundant means of knowing Scotsmen well. But the particular variety of Scotch pride which Smollett seems to have exemplified was not of the most amiable or interesting. *Nemo me impune lacessit* is a very manly, and may be a very noble, motto. But in order to carry it out nobly, the defensive promptitude must not be coupled with an unreasonable readiness either to take offence or to give it. Smollett appears to have been at all times exceedingly prone to do both. Moreover, his

temper, besides its low flashing point, seems to have been distinguished by a morose and grumbling habit, from which very fiery tempers are often free. He seems to have been very affectionately disposed towards his friends and family, and by no means ungenerous or parsimonious in using his means. But it has been pointed out with rather fatal force that the picture of his own hospitality to his poorer brethren of letters, which he admittedly draws in *Humphry Clinker*, is marred by its total want of delicacy towards the objects of his bounty.

To delicacy, indeed, in any of its forms, Smollett appears to have been an utter stranger. He is admittedly one of the nastiest writers in English; and his tendency towards foulness appears to have been motivated neither by a combination of fascinated and satiric attraction, such as that which marks Swift, nor by a discreditable desire to please morbid tastes, but simply by a natural insensibility improved with a medical education. Something of the same insensibility, of positive defect rather than morbid affection, appears in his selection of at least his two first heroes—personages, with his creation and apparent tolerance of whom he has been constantly and not quite unjustly reproached. In Roderick and Peregrine, it is complained, we have something like a relapse into the worse kind of hero of the Restoration drama—a scheme of humanity from which tenderness, decency, and every note of chivalry except mere courage are banished. Roderick is rather a better fellow than Peregrine, and Peregrine is a very little more of a gentleman than Roderick; but to neither of them can



the words "good fellow" and "gentleman" apply, except relatively and by a sort of apology. It cannot be said indeed that Smollett recommends or excuses the more discreditable actions of either; he even expresses distinct disapproval of those of Peregrine. But he does not seem to regard the type of young man as anything out of the way, or the type of action as anything more than ordinary sowing of wild oats, natural and pardonable enough.

I have said that there is justice in these complaints, and it may well be asked at once what are the merits which make such "a world of vile ill-favoured faults" look, if not exactly handsome, at any rate excusable in Smollett. Fortunately there is not the least difficulty in answering this question. The genius of Smollett, though less original, less gigantic, and less accomplished than that of Fielding, less quaint and engaging than that of Sterne, even I believe, according to some, less intense and peculiar than that of Richardson, was sufficient both in quantity and quality to cover even worse sins than those which have been and may be enumerated. Its strict or at least its apparent originality was indeed the least part of it. If Fielding to some extent took Cervantes for his model, Smollett hardly troubled himself to do anything but follow Le Sage. It is seldom safe to say that without one thing another thing would never have existed; but it is almost safe to say that if there had been no *Gil Blas* there would have been no *Roderick Random*. The Spanish predecessors of the great Breton might indeed have supplied his place as patterns, but some pattern there

must have been, for in no part of his work does Smollett show the least power of striking out a new line in point of form.

His virtue, like that of some very great writers besides himself, lay in working on established lines in a fresh and striking manner. He seems to have had little positive invention, and he did not care to bestow any pains on the constructive part of his stories. Most of them indeed begin in a sufficiently orthodox manner with the birth, and end in an equally orthodox manner with the marriage of the hero. But the intermediate progress is altogether of the "go-as-you-please" order. A slight undercurrent of purpose of the same kind, which was so apparent in the work of Smollett's great imitator, Dickens, may be observed here and there. And, as in Dickens again, a very strong tendency to embody personal experiences, personal observations, it may be personal grudges and "scores", is observable likewise. Much of *Roderick Random*, the first and the freshest, is little more than a slightly travestied record of the author's service in the West Indies and on the Spanish Main. Much of *Humphry Clinker*, the last and the most accomplished, is little more than a record of a tour through England and Scotland. In the two earliest books, such characters as most distinctly emerge are varied studies on the observed type of the tar. The most remarkable character of *Humphry Clinker* is a study of the type of the Scotch adventurer, soldier or sailor, who has retired. That the French, though a little shocked at his so-called brutality, and scandalised at his open aversion from their nation, have, on the whole,

been more attracted to Smollett than to Fielding, is, I believe, a fact, despite M. Taine's instance to the contrary; and it is a fact that tells us a great deal, nearly as much as the other fact that they have preferred Sterne and Richardson to both.

Yet we have not reached the quality which has secured to Smollett a popularity, never perhaps of the very highest, but unfailing and certain. This is to be found—first, in the singular narrative faculty which knits his most desultory bundles of incident and personage into an attaching story; and secondly, in the extraordinary vividness of these individual incidents and sketches. When Scott, in his somewhat partial comparison of Fielding and Smollett, dwelt on the comparative "poverty" of the Englishman, and on the "richness" of the Scotsman, he was either indulging in an amiable paradox, or was honestly deceived by injudiciously selected terms. If he had written "simplicity" and "variety" instead of "poverty" and "richness", it would not have been easy to reject his contrast. Fielding inclines more to the classical, to the sculptured, to the epic; his forte lies in proportion, design, keeping, truth. Smollett is more romantic and more pictorial; he abounds in luxuriance of detail and fantastic particular. The work of the one is a temple or a portico: that of the other a bazaar. And it is unlucky for Smollett that, writing as he did before the influence of the Romantic movement proper had been much felt in England, and possessing little strictly poetical feeling, he was not able to employ many of those graces which have saved Romanticism. He has its vivacity but

not its beauty, its variety but not its charm; while, most noteworthy of all, he is still classical rather than romantic in his handling of character. His resemblance to Jonson must strike every critical reader familiar with both; and it is a resemblance subject to the same qualifications as the corresponding resemblance between Fielding and Shakespeare.

There has, indeed, I believe, grown up of late a distaste for these literary parallels, which is by no means wholly unintelligent; for, interesting and illuminating as they are to the fit reader, they are sometimes apt to mislead the unfit. They can, however, seldom be more in place than between a pair of writers whose juxtaposition is so much more than accidental, and whose works are in a way the very complement of one another. As a mere writer, Smollett was as much Fielding's superior in the lower and more mechanical arts of composition as he was his inferior in the higher and more genial. His education had probably been much more thoroughgoing than any that Fielding can have received at Eton in those days, and he had left Scotland early enough to escape, for the most part, if not entirely, those Scotticisms which marked to the last the work of a man so far his superior in scholarship as Robertson. He seldom breaks Priscian's head in any very outrageous manner; and though his sentences have neither the easy flow of the Addisonian model nor the balanced magnificence of the Johnsonian, though they are often a little too long and sometimes a little too intricate, they seldom call for a distinct "bad mark" from the pencil of the examiner.

When what has been said already has been put together, it will not need very much more demonstration to support the assertion that Smollett is to be criticised better by a series of examinations of his separate novels than by general remarks on his powers as a novelist. To resume the old strain of comparison, it is possible and profitable to set forth the characteristics of Fielding as a whole, because, concerning as they do the very structure and character of his novels, these latter serve chiefly as variations, as shifted forms, of the master's idiosyncrasy. Smollett, working from without and not from within, taking the observed phenomena of external life for his theme, and grouping them as his fancy bid him, is not equally capable of being dealt with generally. A short scenario of one of Fielding's books would, when we have studied the author a little, enable us to imagine how he will deal with it. In Smollett neither the scenario nor any general particulars amount to much: the details are everything. But perhaps it is worth adding that these general peculiarities of Smollett account for, or at least are connected with, the facts that his novels amuse more than those of Fielding, that they are as a rule appreciated at an earlier age, and that, though they never exactly pall—*Humphry Clinker* at least is fresh after a dozen perusals spread over thrice a dozen years—they at no time excite the almost fanatical enthusiasm which a predestined admirer of Fielding feels for that writer when he has once thoroughly grasped him. Smollett is delightful, he is even in a way admirable, but he is not exactly *great*; and it is very interesting to compare such critical handlings of

him as those of Scott, of Hazlitt, and of Thackeray, to see how, in different ways, a sense of this has impressed itself on all of them, even on Scott in his valiant attempt to stand shoulder to shoulder with his countryman in the battle with the English giant.

## RODERICK RANDOM

Turning to *Roderick Random* itself, it is not impertinent to cite Hazlitt's at first odd-looking description of it as "the *purest* of Smollett's novels—I mean in point of style and description". The reader who, remembering the book, reads this phrase for the first time, or who reads the book with the phrase in his mind, may wonder what on earth the critic meant. I think that, though there may have been some wilful intention to use "purest" in the ordinary sense (for Hazlitt was always wilful, and was moreover peculiarly eccentric in his views of this class of subject), what was really and critically meant was a reference to the same quality which I have myself glanced at above in speaking of the book as the "freshest" of the group.

This would almost necessarily follow from its being the first; but not quite necessarily. The fact, however, is undoubted. The book is the work of a very young man, who had for his years seen a good deal of life, who was already noticeable as taking an outside rather than an inside view of it, but whose flow of reminiscence, of fanciful comment, and of humorous handling was as yet not in the least checked or weakened by practice

in periodical or miscellaneous writing, or by the economy to which such practice is apt to dispose men. Probably enough has been said of the eternally debatable question as to the amount of truth underlying the early chapters. Some general resemblance must be admitted as probable in the circumstances, perhaps even a sentiment which, whether justified by the circumstances or not, was felt by Smollett. There is, indeed, an unwonted appearance of meaning in his bitter and not merely superficial reflection that small benefits may excite gratitude and small injuries be forgiven, but that great benefits or deep injuries produce in all but the best minds an equally undying resentment. The history of Mr. Melopoyne again comes too close to that of the author of *The Regicide* not to bear some mark of galling. But in our total ignorance of what Smollett's own fortunes were on board ship, it is impossible to decide whether the miserable alternations of experience on board H.M.S. *Thunder* were personal, or were impartially observed, or were worked up by plastic fancy from less horrible originals; and the determination (according to an inveterate habit of the older novel critic) to see Miss Anne Lascelles in Narcissa is supported by absolutely no evidence, and by not much probability. Smollett's heroines indeed do justify the Popian sneer far better than Fielding's: they really have no character at all for the most part, unless they are shrews or at least comic figures.

Warm admiration, perhaps the warmest of the personal kind excited by any of the author's characters, has been lavished on Strap and Bowling, while few have

had a good word to say for Roderick. In the latter, indeed, there is not much harm. He has little gratitude, and no delicacy; he seems to have no objection to doing good to his friends, but to be much more bent on doing harm to his enemies, and satisfying his own desires. He would probably have behaved fairly well to Narcissa, according to the easy standard of husband-behaviour in his day; and the abuse which has been lavished on his very limited reward of Strap's devotion perhaps involves a slight critical error. To a different person than Roderick, Strap's spaniel-like devotion would probably not have been shown; by a person like Roderick it was sure to be taken with the same sort of Sultanesque indifference which is shown by the cock of a school to his admirers. Smollett might, no doubt, have chosen a more magnanimous hero, but it would have been false drawing to make that hero, as he is, really sensible of Strap's self-sacrifice, which, it must be remembered, was not purely unselfish after all. For Strap was sure that if his idol rose, he, Strap, would rise with him. In other respects the barber, though he suffers from the inevitable comparison with Partridge, is a very delightful and amusing person.

Bowling, if not so amusing, ranks a good deal higher. The foremost in time of appearance of Smollett's famous gallery of naval portraits, he is also the most humane, and not the least human. He is presented to us in his habit as he lived, with that careful attention to the *décor*, the make-up, which always characterises Smollett; and though he was one of the earliest, he is one of the best of the traditional tar pictures. By the



merest accident I happen to have read, even before I read Smollett, Charles Shadwell's not very widely-known play of *The Fair Quaker of Deal*; and anybody who knows that piece will see that Smollett was not the first to work this curious mine of character. But he was the first to extract from it traits that would last; and it ought to be counted to his credit that when he had fallen out of familiarity with the originals, he did not go on multiplying his copies. Many a novelist, including some great ones, would not have known how to leave off. Whether the change which admittedly took place in the personnel of the Navy after the middle of the century, and which replaced the ruffians of the Oakum type and the honest but uncouth sea-dogs like Trunnion with officers and gentlemen, struck Smollett's keenly observant eye, I do not know. It may have been a purely artistic consciousness that he was no longer drawing from the model, but only from his own studies, his own reminiscences of the model. Or it may and perhaps was nothing more exalted than a weariness of the type. But it certainly is rare to find an artist producing figures of such novelty, brilliancy, and gusto as these tars of Smollett's in his earlier work, and almost, if not altogether, abandoning them in his later. Crowe is the chief exception.

There are no other prominent characters, using that word in its strict sense, in *Roderick Random*, though there is a very considerable number of "humours", to use the term of Jonson, or rather of his school, and though the personages who display these humours range in importance and frequency of appearance from

mere supers to actors of some little dignity. Almost universal admiration has been bestowed, and justly, upon one of the very earliest of these sketches, the scene with the curate and the exciseman in Chapter Nine. Hardly anywhere has Smollett risen so close to the true and unforced irony of life, to satire without grotesque, and caricature without extravaganza, as here. The old scholar-extortioner of a landlord, and the adventures in the waggon and out of it, though lively enough and amusing enough, do not rise to this level, and partake much more of the usual material and treatment of the picaresque novel, which is well maintained, but not often, save on shipboard, exceeded during the rest of the book. Outside of the naval characters, however, we shall find nothing so good as not merely the tars proper, but as Beau Jackson, that slight but excellent incarnation of what a later humourist has called don't-care-a-damnateness, and Morgan, the famous Welsh surgeon's mate, whom certain vivid touches and Smollett's obvious familiarity elsewhere with the natives of the Principality defend from the charge of being merely a clever literary *pastiche* from Fluellen and Sir Hugh Evans adjusted to new and lower situations. Indeed, though we only see him in one set of relations, Morgan perhaps deserves that rank of "character" instead of merely "personage" which I have rather too severely refused him above.

We find a less favourable example of Smollett's powers in the story of Miss Williams. It is lamentable enough; and perhaps the surprise and in part indignation which have been expressed at Smollett's unsympathetic

way of telling it are a little unjust. The early and middle eighteenth century was not a time of palpitating sympathy with human suffering; and in more instances than one Smollett has borne in person the sins of his time. A more serious fault is, that, either from want of power or from not taking the trouble, he has not made Miss Williams in the least individual or alive. She is simply "one more unfortunate", a figure, not a person. And you cannot weep for the sufferings of a figure. The same objection applies to the ruffian Crampley, for you can no more detest a figure than you can weep for one. Indeed, it is very soon seen by any critical reader that in consequence either of a defect of Smollett's genius or of the peculiarity of his method, he turns out figures and persons in a hit-or-miss way, very puzzling unless these probable explanations of it are understood. He is anything but successful in Narcissa's aunt (the first of his afterwards much-improved studies in feminine oddity, as distinguished from feminine charm), and despite its abundance of adventure the story goes rather dully in the middle, till we come to the masterly sketch of the Capuchin friar, which may rank beside the curate-and-exciseman chapter already praised. Roderick's experiences as a soldier certainly do not equal in interest his life afloat, but fortunately they are much shorter; while his fortunes when Strap has set him up as a man of fashion alternate remarkably between very lively scenes and very dull ones. It is extremely improbable that at this time, at any rate, Smollett had much acquaintance with the peerage, and the very unfavourable parts which some of its members are made

here to play may be set down partly to the defect of original and first-hand observation (without which he never wrote really well) and partly to other causes. It was a habit of the time either to toady the aristocracy abjectly or to regard them with dislike; and they were as a class particularly unpopular with the untitled gentry both of Scotland and England, whose prejudices Smollett had inherited.

The cynical Banter is not one of his successes, and the Bath scenes show the same inequality as those in London. Even granting that the story within a story was more excusable than modern taste inclines to think, it is impossible to imagine a worse place for such an episode, or rather insertion, as the story of Melopoyne, than just before the *dénouement*; and that *dénouement* itself, though perhaps the *Deus-ex-machina* licence of the style is not too freely used, cannot be said to be very happy. The long-lost father, Don Rodrigo, is the very shadow of a shade, though, no doubt, he is fully equal to the part which the bard has assigned him in an admirable couplet describing the end of novels like this:—

I left them all a-kissing in couples on the decks,  
I left the lovers loving—and the parents signing cheques.

In such and other agreeable occupations and expectations do we leave *Roderick Random*, who, if he did not specially deserve clover, was not perhaps specially undeserving of it. In conning his history, and those other histories of others which are to follow, there is a standing difficulty which is likely to turn into a

pretty constant danger. I think it possible that the foregoing sketch may appear to some who have pleasant and uncritical, perhaps boyish, memories of the book, grudging and unfair. But I do not think it will seem so to any Smollettite who condescends to seek and attempts to give a reason for the faith that is in him.

The fact is, that unless the critic keep to the merest rhetorical generalities, Smollett's method, for reasons already indicated, does not lend itself to criticism of his novels as wholes; and that what has been called the hit-or-miss characteristic of his piecemeal handling necessitates a great deal of inequality in the thing criticised, which in its turn chequers the criticism. Nor will it be necessary, the running analysis of *Random* having been thus made, to pursue, in reference to the other novels, a plan which, while it puts in undue relief the novelist's defects, fails to bring out the chiefest of his merits—the rapid profusion of incident and adventure, of scene and personage. This characterises his fiction throughout, and justly endears it to all who read for the story merely, and to many who, critical exception having been once taken, are content to waive the protest and enjoy simply and easily what is so liberally set before them.

But it may be well, before concluding this general as well as special introduction, to say something further on points which apply to all the novels equally. I have hinted that though Smollett is to blame for a certain overflow of a quarrelsome and morose temper from himself into his books, the rougher features of those books are not wholly chargeable upon him. It was

neither in his nature nor perhaps was it at all his business to "prettify" English life; and the English life of his time was in parts, if not indeed for the most part, excessively rough and coarse. So also in regard to the coarseness in another sense which marks him, it is true that both his temperament and his education aggravated this feature; but it was a feature of the time as much as the other. This defence, moreover, applies in still greater degree to another characteristic of Smollett's, which, no doubt actually popular at the time, has less and less conciliated readers, except very young readers, to him in more recent days. This is the liberty of practical joking, which appears in *Roderick Random*, reaches a ferocious luxuriance in *Peregrine Pickle*, and is seldom absent from the others, notably appearing in the "swan song", the milder evening shades, of *Humphry Clinker*. I have sometimes wondered that the infinite industry of the modern book-maker has not attempted a *History of Practical Joking*. That unlovely practice was not unknown among the ancients, and it was common in a very advanced form among the paladins of earlier and the knights of later medieval chivalry. But it seems to have attained the dignity of something like a national pastime in England between the Restoration and the Regency. I do not know anything more to the credit of George IV (though there are a great many more things to his credit than it pleased Mr. Thackeray to allow) than the sharp rebuke and the handsome amends which Theodore Hook's practical joke on poor Romeo Coates drew from him; and it is from that time that the reprehension of the

practice, in the general judgment, as vulgar and unworthy, may be said to date. But during the time mentioned, Englishmen of all ranks seem to have seen in it nothing but harmless and allowable humour, even when it was pushed to an indulgence in the most inhuman brutality. In the navy it seems to have found a special home, as was not unnatural when a number of men were cooped up together, with frequent periods of idleness, with no very delicate or refined standard of manners, and with the turn for books as yet not popularly developed. After Smollett's day, Miss Burney was to assign to Captain Mirvan a series of practical jokes upon Madam Duval and her Frenchman which would not have been out of keeping in the Garrison itself; and long after Miss Burney, Marryat was to luxuriate in things of the same kind, perpetrated on shore as well as on board ship. Of the universality of the practice, Fielding's books, especially *Joseph Andrews*, the sad experiences of Mr. Gray at the hands of the young gentlemen of Cambridge, and scores of other things in history and fiction, give ample evidence. And Smollett can hardly be blamed for making it prominent in his novels, fitting in as it did exactly with his scheme of literary arrangement and, perhaps, not disagreeing very much with his personal temper and tastes.

There is also one other point in Smollett which is worth noticing, and which has not, I think, been so generally noticed as most other points in him. This is his curious exemplification of what may be called with pardonable exaggeration the Paganism of the eighteenth century. He is not an example of its "philosophism"

or free thinking: I do not at the moment remember the least touch in his writings of the unorthodox thought on the subject which was so common, and with which even Fielding (I think quite falsely) has been charged. The religious point of view seems simply not to have presented itself to Smollett at all. He has quite proper references to the Divinity and to Providence, which are evidently not in the least hypocritical. He seems to have felt little disgust, either intellectual or aesthetic, for Methodism. There is nothing unsound, while there is much that is pathetic, in Commodore Trunnion's famous epitaph with its references to the Resurrection. So also the references to the consolations of religion, as administered to the moribund Monimia in *Fathom*, show neither sneer nor doubt. But, like a more fortunate member of the same service, Mr. Midshipman Easy, Smollett evidently "didn't understand these things"; they did not appeal to him; they did not fall in with his way of looking at life. In him there are none, not merely of the profound commotions which kept the soul of Johnson in a perpetual ferment, but of the occasional bubbles of disturbance which, to keen observers, betray the existence of something similar in the still depths of the mind of Fielding himself. He has nothing either of the strange passion of Swift in relation to such subjects or of the genuine and very unprofessional sincerity which breaks through the grimace and the fashionable trifling of Sterne. The only one of the deeper and higher passions which seems to have stirred Smollett was patriotism, in which a Scotsman rarely fails unless he is an utter gaby or an utter scoundrel.



The heroic heights of love, the sense of the infinite and the eternal, which is the essence of religion, the transcendent consciousness of the irony of life which surmounts all merely grotesque observations and all merely personal feelings—these Smollett had not. He was almost an incarnation of the eighteenth century in its merits and its defects, in its vigour, its shrewdness, its zest and relish of such life as it understood, of the things that are seen, combined with its astonishing blindness and deafness to the things that are not seen.

## PEREGRINE PICKLE

There has been rather more difference of opinion about *Peregrine Pickle* than about the rest of Smollett's novels. Some have held it to be as decidedly the best as it is unquestionably the longest of these novels in their most characteristic form, *Humphry Clinker* being regarded as an experiment by itself. Some, on the other hand, have put it not only far below *Clinker*, but distinctly below *Roderick Random*, in its own class and kind. These relative estimates often depend upon merely accidental causes. The "Memoirs of a Lady of Quality", the history of Mr. Mackercher, and the subsidiary history of Mr. Annesley are said to have greatly increased the popularity of the book at first. They are probably at least as damaging now as they were once helpful to that popularity; more particularly because no one of the three has more than the very smallest share of intrinsic interest. It is also alleged that the humour

runs more to grotesque and caricature; and that the famous dinner after the manner of the ancients is overdone. Lastly, very strong objections are often taken to the character of the hero, not merely in respect of that scene with Emilia, which nobody has defended, but by reason of the general selfishness, want of feeling, and boisterous brutality of his character.

Perhaps these objections, except in reference to the Lady Vane and Mackercher episodes, are carried too far. As to the last of them, little need be said here, because it is practically disposed of, as far as it need not be admitted, in the Introduction to *Roderick Random*. There is extremely little to be said for "Perry" personally, though I have never been able quite to see why Lovelace should receive a partial indemnity, which is not even partially extended to Pickle. The still lingering notion that Richardson's hero was a very fine gentleman, while Peregrine is only a ruffianly hobbledehoy, might, I think, be made a text to show that the *Book of Snobs* did not entirely extirpate snobbishness from the British mind. But Richardson had the prudence to kill his hero; and, I suppose, to some extent, the prayer, "Let this expiate!" was granted. Peregrine's punishment is very light and very temporary, and it is not directly connected with his guilt towards Emilia at all. So posterity has no doubt felt itself just, as well as virtuous, in allotting harder measure to him than to Richardson's rather tradesman-like ideal of a naughty Prince Charming. For the rest, it is sufficiently difficult to make much distinction between them. The conduct of both must seem equally flagitious to the moralist;

while to the "gentleman-sportsman's" taste it must always seem equally disgusting, and equally on a par with the behaviour of a person who should first intoxicate his antagonist at the cards or the foils and then pride himself on having got the better of him in that condition.

These difficulties removed, it will be easy to accord *Peregrine Pickle* a very high rank in its own class of fiction, though it may be even easier to recognise in it the defects of its class. That class never, or very rarely, reduces or exalts the particular sufficiently to the condition of the eternal; and it follows that though eternity may not yet have been brought into the question, the progress of time affects the acceptability of the presentation. There is nothing really obsolete in the "College of Authors" which fills so much of the later pages of *Pickle*: the facts, and the touches of human nature in connection with the facts, are as true now as they were a hundred and fifty years ago. But Smollett has lost himself too much in the *mere* particulars of the time, as he has also, and to a greater extent, in the details of political hanging-on. I have sometimes, as I read Smollett, been reminded, in a vivid if rather painful fashion, of a great deal of work, inferior to his by vast degrees, which appears constantly, and which critics who look before and after are often upbraided with not recognising fully and cheerfully. Somewhere in Hazlitt's *Conversations with Northcote* that critic of the Fitful Head remarks that only those who observe the modern spirit of their own times live. He made, as Hazlitt often did make, a curious confusion. Only those

who observe the modern form of the eternal, and present the eternal form of the modern, live; the others, whether they are recalcitrant opponents of modernity altogether, or greedy followers of it whatever it is, die. And though Smollett was a man of genius—though his record and his personal addition to that record stand altogether out of comparison with the usual contribution to literature of the usual journalist—yet he had to some extent the defect which all persons who can accomplish journalism at all have shown and probably will show. Such men pay for facility, for adequacy up to a certain point, for versatility, for the capacity to work whensoever, wheresoever, and howsoever work is wanted, with a certain falling short of the best things. “All things are double, one against the other”; and the only consolation that I know for those who are gifted with the lower talent is that they can at least recognise the higher genius, and that they need not fall either into the error which keeps a man from producing any work at all because he is in this or that way precluded from producing the greatest, or into complacent acquiescence in mere hack-work—in scamped, in ignorant, and in Philistine book-making.

This, however, is rather a far cry from *Peregrine Pickle*, and the excursion is only to be justified by the fact that Smollett is so remarkable an example of the men who, though, on the whole, men of letters, are journalists first of all, and that this book is the chief performance which exhibits him to us in this mixed yet by no means blurred character. The book is certainly one of the capital books of English literature in

respect of vivacity, of variety, of vigour. I cannot agree with those who put the crew of the *Garrison* distinctly below the complement of *H.M.S. Thunder*. Dickens, who is the real, as Marryat is the accidental, Smollett of the nineteenth century, has made a stout and not unconvincing fight for that procedure of his own in respect to Mr. Pickwick, which, as every competent critic has seen, corresponds to the procedure of Cervantes with *Don Quixote* and the procedure of Smollett with *Trunnion*. We see the salient and absurd things first, the more hidden and the less absurd things later. The perpetual atmosphere of practical joke which prevails, and the dog-like fidelity of Pipes to the commands, no matter what they be, of his immediate superiors, no matter who they are, somewhat obscure the credibility of the story.

But if Richardson showed his skill in the most hackneyed and obvious part of the novelist's methods by killing *Lovelace*, certainly Smollett showed his much better by killing *Trunnion*. That scene is unquestionably one of the great deathbeds of English fiction. It may be a little too technical—we cannot now be sure whether the tars of Smollett's day did or did not indulge in that exuberance of nautical metaphor which he attributes to them. But the reference to Mrs. *Trunnion* as "an honest heart in her own way, thof she goes a little crank and humoursome, by *being often overstowed with Nantz and religion*"; the other to Ned *Gauntlet's* daughter, which *Peregrine* was to neglect so shamefully; and the delightful excursus on mermaids, "thof I must say, for my own part, I never met with

any of those sweet singers, and I have gone to sea for the space of thirty years"; the immortal note, "I would be buried in the red jacket I had on when I boarded and took the *Renummy*"; with the still greater postscript as to the epitaph, and the final blessing,—these make up what is perhaps Smollett's masterpiece on a small scale. He has here shown, as he shows too seldom elsewhere, how the great things of life, whereof death is perhaps the greatest, transcend the small—how they dignify and exalt human weakness without blinking or suppressing it. There is no snivel or sensibility by Commodore Trunnion's bed as there is by some other celebrated pieces of funeral furniture. His end is with those of Cleopatra and Falstaff and Colonel Newcome—less exquisite but not less consummate.

Hatchway and Pipes, much as they torment him, are so much part of him that their comparative eclipse, when he departs, is only natural; while Hatchway, divided between a sort of mischievous comradeship and rivalry with Trunnion and a subjugation to the more youthful and dazzling qualities of Peregrine, is natural from the first to the last. Pipes, if not exactly a model character, is a precious embodiment of the do-this-and-he-doeth-it class of mankind—than which mankind has many worse classes. Cadwallader Crabtree is perhaps almost more deeply stamped than any other of Smollett's characters with the brand of "humour", in the somewhat mistaken sense in which Shadwell borrowed it from Jonson and Smollett from Shadwell. The misanthropist of fiction is rarely a live character. There were few things in which Scott showed his

unerring judgment better than in making the Antiquary one merely in externals. But when the duchess called Crabtree an "old ruffian", she was only too complimentary to him. The "old image" of Smollett's great pupil would have been a better description. As for the divine Emilia, she has met with rather hard measure from some. It is not sufficiently remembered that the average young woman of the eighteenth century in fiction, if not in fact, was brought up to believe herself very much in the relation of a merchant ship to a privateer as regards the dreadful creature man. He would, if he could, make his prize of her on any terms, but it was "his nature to"; and if he could be persuaded into honourable convoy for life instead, this was equally creditable to both parties concerned. The *Emilia* galley, beating off the purely piratical attempts of the *Peregrine* picaroon, secures its lawful and honourable company on the most favourable terms, and condones the past. We cannot conceive Juliet or Imogen, even Rosalind or Beatrice, behaving quite in the same way. But then Shakespeare was not Smollett, nor Smollett Shakespeare.

The minor characters, as usual with our author, play their parts sufficiently well, if not more than sufficiently. The unnatural hatred of Mrs. Pickle for her elder son is so unnecessary to the story that one suspects some private grudge or reminiscence—though it certainly cannot refer to Smollett's own mother, with whom he was, on the most affectionate terms. But the vanity of Pickle *père* is very amusing, and his hopeful namesake, though something of a repetition of Squire Gawky, is

still alive. We are ravished with the glimpse of Mr. Morgan at Canterbury, and with his magnanimous forgiveness of "Mr. Rantum" for having "revealed and divulged and published" their joint private affairs—a view of the matter in which Mr. Morgan greatly outstrips some of his youngers and betters. And everybody must acknowledge that the purely picaresque adventures of the tour in France are done about as well as they can be done. Only very severe moralists who insist on applying the same morality without the least alteration to fiction and to fact, need grieve over the fate of Mr. Hornbeck. I myself have always thought the antique dinner very pleasant comedy, for the abuse of archaeological pedantry has not exactly decreased since Smollett's time, though it is not often now carried on in quite such a practical manner. As for Pallet, it is really a pity that he cannot be identified. He must have had an original; and that original must have been a very delightful person. We know hardly anything of the ways and personalities of British painters (Hogarth excepted) before the middle of the eighteenth century; but Mr. Matthew Arnold himself could not have imagined an ideal of the British Philistine in the infancy of his apprenticeship to art more perfect and more in keeping than Pallet. As for the "physician", if Akenside, as seems to be certain, is meant, Smollett's Tory antipathy to ultra-Whigs must have been awakened long before he took to writing history. And for Sophy, and Gauntlet, and his mother, and Jolter, and Julia, and Mr. Clover, and the rest, they do their parts, and what can puppets do more? The ministers and



ministers' hangers-on who appear in the later chapters are perhaps hardly to be so much complimented, but they belong to a class, or rather a group of classes, who are frequent in fiction, and who always suffer under the same curse. Whenever a novelist takes into his head to attack a type, be it official or professional, clerical or lay, whenever he is affected by the disease of purpose, so soon also do sterility, dead-aliveness, unreality come upon his work.

It must, however, be admitted that, except in the episodes, there is very little sterility or dead-aliveness, while, except in the more fantastically caricatured parts, there is very little unreality in *Peregrine Pickle*. Some fifteen generations of youth—taking a generation of youth at the liberal term of ten years, from eight to eighteen—have rejoiced in it, since it was written, with a rejoicing greater than that in *Roderick Random* itself. Mr. James Payn, if I remember rightly, not long ago suggested that boys read Fielding and Smollett chiefly, if not wholly, for the impropriety of them. But it is Mr. Payn's humour—a humour which I could understand better in a less genial and a less successful writer—to depreciate his literary ancestors, and to wonder how anybody can take genuine pleasure in them. I do not think that the many thousands—probably millions—who have sought this particular tree of knowledge, have been merely or mainly attracted to it as a source of knowledge of evil, or even of those things, not evil at all in themselves, of which it is not the fashion to speak. This may be a part of the relish of its truth, but it is a very small part. The varied phantasmagoria of

life, the unceasing play of humour, the rough but by no means unkindly tone of merriment and good-fellowship would have secured popularity by themselves, and have, I believe, as a rule, secured it by themselves.

Indeed, it may be questioned whether the book, if not quite so spontaneous and *primesautier* as *Roderick Random*, is not a pleasanter one on the whole. For moral griminess, even the worst scene in it will not match the worst in the earlier novel, and there is nothing—unscrupulous as are “Perry’s” jests, and unsavoury as are some of the results of them—to match in sordid horror with the worst squalors and cruelties of H.M.S. *Thunder*. The famous “peal of elvish laughter” applies to *Peregrine Pickle* very really and truly. And, lastly, we have to note in it a further step in the direction of one of the author’s greatest triumphs. Grizzle Pickle, or Trunnion, or Hatchway is a long way in advance of Narcissa’s aunt: she is less near to her, indeed, than she is to the immortal Tabitha Bramble.

So that we may, as the case may be, take leave of or embark upon this long and curious book with a great deal of charity. I must confess that I envy not a little those who read it for the first time. As with all its author’s books, except *Humphry Clinker*, a certain difficulty attends later perusals. You find yourself dipping, skipping, turning from this part with disappointment, turning to the other with not always recompensed hope. But to read a first time, especially in youth, it is one of the most satisfactory of such books, almost of all books. And even if the second reading is not like the first, there hangs about such books so

read in youth a peculiar fragrance, "an old-world scent of roses", which overpowers any mustiness or mildew that time or their own imperfection may have fixed upon them.

## FERDINAND COUNT FATHOM

*Ferdinand Count Fathom* is one of those books of which *habent sua fata* is most true. It was not, at its appearance, quite so popular as its author's earlier novels. It grew, not exactly into a great but into a considerable popularity. Even in Scott's days it was the fashion to prefer it to *Jonathan Wild*, and the remarks of that great man on the two supply one of the few instances in which I find it myself quite impossible to follow his argument. Almost ever since, the value of *Fathom* on the general literary stock-exchange has been falling; and I think it would now be possible to find a good many readers of *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and *Humphry Clinker* who have never opened it, or who, having opened it, have found it impossible to get beyond the first chapter or two.

This is pretty obviously a case for careful "distinction", in the old logical sense. It is not a case of the merely popular book which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven; of the kind of book which all critics who are critics know (though I observe that they sometimes think it necessary to conceal their knowledge) to be popular and worthless. And some of the objections recently brought against *Fathom* will not

hold water. The robber scenes which were, as it seems to us, so extravagantly praised, really deserve, when they are examined with the true historic examination, very considerable applause. Smollett had, no doubt, models for them in his Spanish and French originals,—most writers have models for most things, and Smollett, in particular, had models for almost everything that he did. But he has really infused a “browner horror” into his handling—a *frisson nouveau* into his style. What is unlucky for him is, that some time after he wrote the Germans took up this style, the English terror-mongers, with Mrs. Radcliffe and “Monk” Lewis at their head, followed the German lead, and the thing became exaggerated and hackneyed.

In another point Smollett has suffered, not from those who came after him, but from those who came before him. The eighteenth-century theory of the ruling passion—of the man who is all of a piece—had its influence on him, and had it rather fatally. We all know that, as a matter of fact, Ferdinand Count Fathom never existed; that the unmitigated scoundrel never does exist, at least in the sense of art. What is still puzzling is that a man like Scott should, on this valuation, have set Ferdinand above Jonathan. There are those who, admitting that the Popian hypothesis had no good effect on either, think that many points in Wild—not least his derogation from his great ideal in the affairs with the Count La Ruse and in those with Laetitia—set him much above his imitator and rival (as the other Count unquestionably was), and who hold that Fielding’s maintenance of his hero to the

end is even more above the sudden conversion of Fathom by mere physical ills into a proper moral man. But even these critics would admit that both are, in a sense, extra-natural.

Here, however, it is the intrinsic rather than the comparative merits of the book which concern us. These intrinsic merits are numerous. In the first place, there is the Dedication to Doctor —, which has been unanimously recognised as autobiographical, or perhaps we should say, autocritical. Perhaps these things are not in the most perfect taste; perhaps it may be further urged that, to intelligent readers, they are pretty nearly superfluous. But posterity is usually lenient to interesting personalities who indulge in personal revelation, and we are not very sorry to have a picture of "Smollett's Smollett". Still, as Mr. Hannay has justly enough remarked, an author seldom attributes to himself defects of which he is really ashamed. Indeed, we are reminded in this description, as in many others, of the immortal story of the man who leant against the chimney-piece, gazed upon his own countenance in the mirror, and said: "Plain; yes, d—d plain; but there's something genteel about the face!" The defence of the unmixed villany of the hero is less satisfactory, because the moral enterprise is not very particularly interesting; because Smollett betrays his ignorance of the fact that only such ironic handling as Swift and Fielding had given before, and as Thackeray has given afterwards, can carry off the elaborate depicting of a villain; and because he was unwise enough to plume himself on having raised up a virtuous character

in opposition to the adventurer, which virtuous character, when we come to know him, is one of the most tedious of lay figures. There may also be some difference of opinion in a squeamish age on the question whether the author has, as he thinks, "avoided every hint which could give umbrage to the most delicate reader"; but that is a trifle. The book would, on the whole, be distinctly less interesting without its dedication, and it is by no means of every dedication that as much can be said.

When we start fair on the story, we meet, by the common consent of all judicious critics, with a really interesting figure in the person of the hero's mother. Unfortunately, according to Smollett's wont with his minor personages, he has not made the camp-follower a character. She is only a type: we should acknowledge the fidelity of her general presentment, but we should not be able to recognise her individuality if we had personally known hundreds of this kind of Amazon-devil. It has, I believe,—employment with armies in the field having become rare, and even when opportunity offers, much circumscribed by the pedantic institution of a more or less efficient military police,—chiefly fallen back on the entertainment of the navy and the merchant service during the sojourn of sailors on shore. Many practitioners quite true to Fathom's mother may still, I have been credibly told, be found in the dock quarters of London and other large seaports, their operations being a little, but not much, tempered by the exertions of the civil magistrate and his myrmidons. Even these have few occasions of safely

exercising the dagger—to hocus, strip, and plunder is their usual limit. Still, the profession continuing, though in a somewhat ghastly and thin-faced manner, it cannot but be interesting to have this type of it sketched by the hand of a master who, by his time and circumstances, was not at all unlikely to have been acquainted at first hand with professionals in their palmy days. Scott, I may observe, was in all probability not indebted to Mrs. Fathom when he drew Madge Wildfire's mother, and the comparison is extremely interesting. In the one case we have a type drawn from intimate knowledge; in the other, a person vivified by the author's genius, but originally drawn less from the life.

The early adventures of Count Fathom are not easily distinguishable from those of the usual picaresque hero, save for his lack of even the usual redeeming features of such heroes, and for a very distinct advantage in vigour and interest at such moments as his expectation of the return of the intoxicated jeweller. The cottage in the forest, if not quite so good as it seemed to a generation prepared to enjoy such things and not yet *blasé* with them, is really good, and has been followed, if not imitated, ever since. But there is no doubt that one of the very best passages in the story—one of the very best passages in Smollett—is the famous incident when Fathom, imprudently attempting in Paris to play too much for his own hand, is "bit", as his own day said, by the false Sir Stentor Stile. I have never been able to satisfy myself whether this picture—the furthest pushed exercise on the same motive which gave some attempts in the late Restoration comedy,

which was outlined in their faint and genteel manner by the Queen Anne essayists, and which Fielding adopted not merely in the famous full length of Squire Western but in various less elaborate studies—was a real portrait of the English country gentleman. It *may* be a mere caricature prompted by Whig partisanship in Addison, Steele, and Fielding, by stage temptations in the dramatists, by Irish jealousy in Swift (for Sir John Linger comes into it), by Scotch jealousy in Smollett, and generally in all by the still sharp division between wits and scholars, men of the town on the one hand and the oak-and-rock-born sons and lords of the soil on the other. The question, so far as I know, has never been exhaustively treated, and this certainly is not the place so to treat it. But everybody must acknowledge, whatever his own private predilections must be, that the sketch of Sir Stentor is a masterly piece of bravura, admirably designed and kept throughout.

Few, I suppose, are much enamoured of the History of the Noble Castilian; and the journey from Canterbury to London will probably be found a very welcome change by almost all modern readers. But the subsequent adventures of Fathom in town and at Bristol, repeating as they do almost in exact parallelism the adventures of Roderick and of Peregrine in the capital and at Bath, exhibit with an interesting but not a slavish repetition Smollett's abilities in dealing with the two spheres—the great society of the metropolis and the small society of the watering-place. I should very much doubt whether he had much direct familiarity with the former. In his early days, when he had not much to do,



he had no money and no position; in his later, though he was somebody, and not ill-off, he was a very hard-worked man of letters, who lived out of the centre, and, as we know by direct testimony, did not come much or willingly into it. The accounts that he gives of London society are accordingly drawn very much from the outside, and it is only at the last, in *Humphry Clinker*, that we get livelier touches.

In the oddities of Bath, of Bristol, of Harrogate, on the other hand, he was pretty well at home. Though we do not know very much about his ways of life, we know that he did actually sojourn at these places, and we may fairly suspect that he was a good deal at them. And here, it must be remembered,—that is to say, in places where entire or comparative strangers meet, where they show the outside of their characters chiefly, but show that outside with a freedom such as they would not choose or would not dare to use at home,—lies the special province of a draughtsman of “humours” like Smollett, or later like Dickens. We shall see in the delightful novel above referred to, what Smollett could do in this way at his matured and mellowed best; but we see in the present instance what he could do considerably earlier.

The episode (though it is hardly even an episode) of King Theodore of Corsica does not greatly affect the story; and it is almost impossible for a man of the present generation to take a genuine and unhistorical interest in Renaldo or Monimia. The supposed death of the latter in particular is imagined and executed with a really terrible coldness. Cynics of all ages have

exhausted their quivers on the unreality of the theatrical curtain, where every spectator knows that the expiring victim will get up, and go home, and eat her supper cheerfully in almost all cases, with extreme merriment in some. But this is a somewhat illegitimate abuse of the juxtaposition of professional and personal identity. The worst of the death of Monimia is that, in the story itself and as it occurs, hardly a babe in arms can believe in it. The "sable hearse adorned with white plumes", even if it had not served to introduce an aside of the virtuous-sentimental character, which could not be more out of place anywhere than in Smollett's work, can deceive nobody. Things become much more actual during Fathom's practice at Tunbridge Wells, where that advantage which has been already discussed again comes to Smollett's aid, and where his professional experience puts him in still better case to write vividly, so that the rise, progress, and declination of a charlatan are delineated with an excellent spirit. As much can hardly be said for the closing scenes, where the improbable transformation of Fathom from a scoundrel without one noble, without even one sympathetic point in his character, to a penitent recluse with a faithful wife to whom he is faithful, is complicated by a sentimental melodrama of the kind which Smollett has seldom tried except in this novel, and for the management of which he was totally unfitted by nature and education.

On the whole, though there are—as has been said, and I hope shown—some excellent and even super-excellent things in it, I think *Ferdinand Count Fathom*

may be considered Smollett's least good novel, less good even than the far less generally popular one which will follow it here. The reasons for preferring *Sir Launcelot Greaves* will be given when we come to it. As for *Fathom* itself, a few more words may commend it to the indulgent but not uncritical notice, and the not infrequent enjoyment, of the reader. I think there can be no doubt, considering its appearance tolerably soon after *Pickle*, and the long gap which then followed in the author's novel-writing, that he felt himself for the present "written out", and had the sense and judgment to accept the fact, and to lie by, as far as this particular kind of writing was concerned, until he had amassed a new store of humours and experiences. For without humours and experiences, be it once more repeated, Smollett was not, and could never have been, a great novelist. "I fancy he did not invent much", says Thackeray in one of those sentences of divination which from the mouth of an expert critic, who is also an expert practitioner, are final. In *Fathom* he had set himself a task in which, to succeed greatly, he would have had to invent a good deal. His object in choosing the theme is not entirely clear, but I imagine it to have been to prove that he was "on the side of the angels", that morality had nothing to fear from him, and so forth. Certainly morality had nothing to fear from him in respect of Roderick and Peregrine; but I do not know that she had much to thank him for in respect of Ferdinand.

Yet the book will always hold a place of positively high interest with those students of the novel from the

historical side, who see in it the link, to some extent, between the Spanish-French novel of adventure pure and simple and the later adventure-novel of Mrs. Radcliffe, of Lewis, of Godwin, of Maturin. And, besides, its special passages contribute to Smollett's share of the portrayal of those spots all-important in eighteenth-century life, the inland watering-places, which occupied the holiday-makers and the valetudinarians of our ancestors before the two voices of the mountains and the sea had been heard. If it is not very great, it is also not very long, and in parts at least it is very amusing.

## SIR LAUNCELOT GREAVES

In the Introduction to *Ferdinand Count Fathom* a hint was given that I think better of the book in which, after a long interval, Smollett resumed novel-writing, than most critics have thought; and in particular, that it seems to me a better book than *Fathom* itself. The reasons for this opinion, which is by no means adopted as a paradox, must now be given. Of course there can be no intention, in any rational person, of denying or evading the obvious and *prima facie* objection which lies against the whole plan and conception of *Sir Launcelot Greaves*. It would be idle in the critic, and impertinent to the reader, to attempt a defence of a blunder which Smollett himself, though none too graciously, yet practically, admitted. How he came to

adopt the preposterous scheme of actual knight-errantry in the middle of the eighteenth century and in England, though not a very important question, is not at all difficult to answer. He must always be following somebody; he had himself translated *Don Quixote*; and his sojourn in prison as a result of the affair with Admiral Knowles perhaps gave a further impulse. But it is a singular evidence of that infertility of invention which (after Thackeray) has been noted in him that, instead of transposing the conception and situation of the Don, as might have been without much difficulty done, into a key suitable to the manners of the country and the time, the novelist should have lugged the actual knight-errant—ceremony of consecration, armour, comic squire, intentionally masquerading adversaries and all—bodily into his English and modern atmosphere and scenery. It is even useless to point out the individual inconveniences which followed from this error; the error itself is too gross and palpable to need critical exposition.

But when this has been once said and allowed for, the book, even after heavy deduction on this score, takes, I think, a very much higher rank than has been generally allowed it. The "humours" which, as we noted, were becoming strained, blurred, and washed out in *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, appear again with almost if not quite the freshness and vividness of *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle*. The very first paragraph is quite admirable in its way, and though it has been imitated a thousand times since (more especially by Dickens, who never himself did anything better), it is still a capital

example of a style which was then almost, if not quite, a novelty in English fiction. The novelist, oppressed with the consciousness of his frivolity, and his low estate at the Muses' court, had nearly always endeavoured to propitiate the grave and precise reader by a solemn beginning—a disquisition or moral prelection, a recapitulation in form of the previous history of the hero's family, a set landscape, or the like. Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett himself hitherto had seldom failed in some such ceremonial exordium, in some such bow and flourish to the public. How different is the plunge into the kitchen of the little public-house on the side of the highway, with the red brick floor, the Windsor chairs, the pewter plates, the bowl of rumbo, and the pint of twopenny!

And the personages are worthy of this pleasing *décor*. The somewhat negative Fillet, an excellent and almost necessary assistant and scene-shifter; the eccentricity of Captain Crowe, who is Smollett's earlier tar, with at least a sufficient difference; the dapper lawyer Clarke; the sour Ferret; Dolly, the waiting-maid, susceptible but not indiscreet—they all seem to me to have a distinctness, a life about them, to which hardly a single character in *Fathom* can pretend, and which is by no means universal even in the two first novels. Of course, according to his general scheme, Smollett proceeds before very long to push the various types rather to extremity. We have a little too much of Crowe's nauticalities, of Clarke's law-jargon, of Ferret's underhand cantankerousness. But they are treated in so lively a fashion that we hardly mind it.

The next scene is no doubt affected to a certain extent by the central blunder of the plot. Yet even the knight and the squire, the fact of their existence once pardoned, are by no means bad company, and play off the humours of the others by no means unhappily. The subsequent history of the Greaves and Darnel families seems to have struck the author himself as a little dull; but it was so much in accordance with the rules of art as they were understood in his time that it would be unreasonable to find much fault with it. Nay, some have seen in the peerless Aurelia Darnel (who now makes, though only in narrative, her first appearance), Smollett's most successful attempt at a heroine. I do not know that I can go as far as that myself, Aurelia appearing to me to possess very little more of the qualities of flesh and blood than her sisters. But she is certainly not disagreeable; and even Sir Launcelot, despite the cruelly hopeless presentation which his creator has pleased to make of him, is far from being the worst specimen of an orthodox hero of romance. His very craze saves him from the mere insipidity to which his kind is too, too subject; and I cannot help seeing here a faculty which Smollett had not previously shown, though he was to show it again, and far better exercised, in *Humphry Clinker*—the faculty of making a character humorous only on one side, and gifted on others with the ordinary or even with some show of the extraordinary virtues and talents of mankind. I do not know that it is possible to subject the probability or improbability of the escapade of Crowe to any certain critical tests; nor might it be worth while to do so if it

were possible. If the scheme of the book is not ruled out at once as intolerable, this development of it may well find admission. But the practical joke that follows, in the shape of the attempt to frighten the old sailor during his vigil in the church, cannot be considered a very happy relapse of our author into this well-worked vein of his; and the subsequent confusion in the inn is the very refuse of the cut-and-dried stock-in-trade of the adventure novelist. It is true that it is a little relieved by the really humorous interview between the knight accomplished and the knight aspirant, in which, it must be confessed, Sir Launcelot comes out of the position as little ridiculous as may be.

The adventures on the road are again very fair; the election sufficiently Hogarthian; and the representative of the country party, Sir Valentine Quickset, though as inferior to Sir Stentor Stile as most of the figures of this book are superior to those of *Fathom*, a fair addition to the series of such portraits which Smollett's Whiggery and Scotchmanship prompted. We need not attempt to determine very accurately whether Justice Gobble is equally a caricature of the lesser *nouveau riche* who was gradually ousting the older squirearchy. But the manner in which Sir Launcelot discomfits him, by an audacious combination of errantry on his own side and pettifoggery on the part of lawyer Clarke, is really funny, and, like some other things in this book, shows a subtler irony than Smollett had previously attempted. Neither is the taming of the two haberdasher captains unamusing. But the vice of the plot appears in, rather than excuses, the quarrel between Launcelot and Crowe



over the charms of Aurelia and Besselia, which is little better than very poor farce.

It would be unfair to criticise with equal severity the scene between Launcelot and Aurelia herself. Smollett no doubt never showed to much advantage in such scenes, and seems to have chiefly aimed at a laborious imitation of the taste of the time, the sentimental gallantry of which he of course exaggerated, while he could not catch anything of its airy and dainty grace. The misfortunes of Crowe, the sufferings of Crabshaw at the hands of nurse and doctor (a subject which Smollett was only too well qualified to treat with gusto), and those of Crowe again in his errant novitiate, with the sketch of the good magistrate Elmy to set against that of the bad magistrate Gobble, once more supply stuff not any worse and perhaps a little better than the main stuff of all these novels.

I suppose that Smollett intended the four-handed fight between Launcelot and Crowe, Sycamore and Dawdle, to be the climax of his "New Don Quixote", though or because it was one of the incidents which he borrowed most directly from the old. It is managed not without art; for the conflict between Sir Launcelot's religious and moral sentiments and his knight-errant principles, in the matter of a purely fantastic challenge, is both intended and well suited to lead in such a character to resipiscence on the subject of knight-errantry generally, and so to conduct things to a suitable and easy catastrophe. On the other hand, the facetious and farcical side of the matter is well provided for in Dawdle's treacherous employment of the bladder

to frighten Crowe's steed, which has been, I believe, one of the most favourite pieces of Smollett's horse-play. At the same time, as nothing is more closely connected with the central idea, so nothing is more endangered by whatever damage and discredit that idea may carry with it.

The scenes in the prison and the madhouse and the astrological experiences of Crowe once more deserve pretty much the same phrases which have been so often applied to the staple of the book; and I cannot determine to my own satisfaction whether the extremely superfluous transformation of Dolly Cowslip into Miss Dorothea Greaves, with its almost deliberate imitation of some things in the *dénouement* of *Joseph Andrews* (which may be compared with the parts played by the pocket-books here and in *Tom Jones*), was intentional or not. If it was, it could not, considering the earlier relations of Fielding himself with Richardson, be said to be exactly improper, though it was certainly unwise, conveying as it does no ironic treatment with it. It seems, however, on the whole more probable that there was no such intention, and that it was merely an instance of Smollett's habit of availing himself of the common stage tricks, the ordinary "revolutions and discoveries" of this sort of fiction.

I hope I may have already shown some cause for regarding the book as, despite its disastrous plan, by no means a bad specimen of that sort. Even if the adventures were less lively than they are, the story which tells them is too short to be wearisome. It appeared, as has been said, at least some of it, in parts;

and there is a tradition (which Scott gives) that at least some of it was written during visits at country houses, and that the author sent his work to press without any trouble of correction either in manuscript or in print. There is indeed no particular reason why he should not have done so, and if it lost a little in coherence and reasonableness of plot, it probably gained not a little in that spontaneity and freshness which have been here claimed for it, which had shown some signs of being on the wane even in *Peregrine Pickle*, and in which *Ferdinand Count Fathom* is almost altogether deficient.

For these reasons the book can be left to itself with almost more confidence, and with greater advantage, than any other of Smollett's. Those to whom its first error of conception is fatal are never likely to make much headway with it; and those who, reading it merely for the amusement, find it less satisfactory in volume and variety than its earlier brethren, are never likely to be much conciliated to it by elaborate critical argument. Between the two there may be, I hope, a sufficient body of adherents who are content to take it as it is, and who find it by no means displeasing—who may even, as I confess is my own case, like it better the more they read it, and find that the author's advance in good-nature and softened feeling gives it as great an advantage over *Roderick* and *Peregrine* as the comparative freedom from "marks of the collar" give it over *Fathom*.

## HUMPHRY CLINKER

With *Humphry Clinker* one comes, well pleased, to that book of Smollett's which it is not necessary to praise in the least "by allowance". Even Hazlitt, though he thought it necessary to lay special stress on certain characteristics which it shares (and in much less degree) with all its fellows, and though he has yoked it strangely enough with *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, is enthusiastic over it, and calls it "the pleasantest gossiping novel ever written". Three-quarters of a century have passed since Hazlitt wrote, with an ever-increasing store of novels; yet it deserves this description almost as well as ever.

But it also deserves a great deal more than this. In fact, it is difficult to discover any hard thing to say of it, except that just sufficient of Smollett's earlier and uglier characteristics appears, here and there, to reassure us against the supposition of his having undergone one of those complete and miraculous changes which he and his contemporaries were too much given to depicting in their novels. He is, as Mrs. Dinmont observed to her husband, "the old man yet" in certain rather unnecessary passages to be found chiefly in reference to the sojourn at Clifton, to the baths at Bath, and to the food supply of London; while that singular imitative mania of his seems sometimes to betray itself in a kind of Sternian innuendo, not found in any of his work before Sterne had written, and assisted by the

fantastic spelling of Winifred Jenkins and her mistress. But if Hazlitt (who is never to be neglected) had not chosen to exaggerate this defect, it might hardly have been necessary even to allude to it.

Otherwise, there is no drawback to the excellence of the book. Here only has Smollett handled his "humours" so as to produce characters as well—continuous living personages who breathe and exist, and do not merely go through motions. Lydia and Lydia's lover are indeed hardly entitled to the benefit of this encomium; but even they are extremely passable in their class. So kindly and genial are the light and heat of art that pervade the book, that, as may be noted in all the works of the greater novelists, and in the best of those who have any pretensions to greatness, they extend to quite minor personages, to personages even of whom we see little or nothing directly. The cross-grained footman Thomas; Dr. Lewis (confidant of the Squire, ungrateful rejector of Tabitha's young love, and recipient of her indignant epistles); Mansel, the ill-conditioned Jesus man, who takes young Melford's character away in his absence and drowns his dog in a practical joke; the oddities of Clifton and Bath and Harrogate (more specially Mr. Micklewhimmen, the most living Scotsman of English fiction before Scott himself took the matter in hand); the Yorkshire and north-country squires whom the Bramble family visit; the Scottish notorieties whom (with rather dubious taste but in a kindly spirit enough) Smollett has introduced;—in short, all the minor characters, with the possible and not offensive exceptions of the good highwayman Martin, Lady Griskin, and one

or two others, enjoy this unwonted heat and light of conception and execution.

The description of places and scenes is no longer, as it too often is earlier, either academic or caricatured. The old ill-temper (it was never exactly misanthropy), though something like it breaks out now and then, is mellowed to good-natured satire. The adventures adjust themselves to the actual visible chances of life, and are neither improbable nor brutal. The famous and often-quoted paradox about "the soul's dark mansion battered and decayed" never fulfilled itself quite so well as here. The "chinks that Time had made" in Smollett's rather case-hardened mind and temper did indeed "let in new light". Perhaps the final months, of which we know so little, were spent at Lucca and Leghorn more happily and in less pain, though in more danger, than those earlier ones at Nice and elsewhere, which brought about the jaundiced record of the *Travels*. Perhaps that "calmed and calming *mens adep̄ta*" of which the obscurest but not the least great of the Elizabethans speaks, had at last come to Smollett; perhaps he actually enjoyed a sojourn in the Land of Beulah before he crossed the river. At any rate, the ease, the geniality, the unforced and varied merriment (if merriment be not perhaps rather too violent a word) which the book displays, have never escaped competent judges. There is nothing quite like it in literature for a becoming leave-taking, for such a peroration with such circumstance of felicitous display of the best and happiest gifts of the orator.

As even the slight parts display a freedom, a *verve*

which was often wanting earlier to the more elaborate, so the sharper and harder touches exhibit a mellowness not to be found earlier. It is very curious to remember that Smollett, whose immediately previous original work had been the almost insanely ferocious political satire of the *Adventures of an Atom*, here devoted to one of the very personages of that satire itself those admirable sketches of the foibles of Newcastle which excited the admiration of Macaulay.

In the more obvious externals of the book there is perhaps not much more originality than in the rest of Smollett's work. Letters had long been a not unfamiliar form for fictitious composition, and the device of obtaining contrasted lights by allowing members of the same family to describe the same circumstances had, as Scott has noted, been adopted some years before in Anstey's *New Bath Guide*. The humours of odd spelling must have tempted authors as soon as spelling ceased to be merely a matter of the taste and fancy of the printer, and had been used abundantly and with admirable success by Swift. The "Tour" or "Travel" was, as the prefatory matter facetiously acknowledges, a favourite literary exercise of the time; and in combining these various popular appeals Smollett did not bestow much more labour or employ a much more craftsmanlike plot and intrigue than had been usual with him.

Thus he was true to his own method in generals; the distinguishing (and among its own companions the incomparable) excellence of *Humphry Clinker* is the excellence of the particulars. Of the major characters it

is admitted that Matthew Bramble himself, Tabitha, Winifred Jenkins, and Lismahago are the best projected studies of general humanity that Smollett has produced, and capable of holding their heads up in almost any company. Clinker himself is not, in my judgment, nearly so good; indeed, I do not think him quite so good as most critics have thought him. He relapses a little into the eighteenth century and (as some are pleased to call it) "Gallo-Classic" type. He is the faithful and rather unsophisticated servant, with a difference of Methodism: not the man. There is perhaps a slight defect of idiosyncrasy in Mr. Jeremiah Melford; but this is artistically excusable, for "Squire Jerry" has thrown upon him the chief duty of comparatively impartial narrator, of background to throw up the main figures in front; and a certain degree of effacement of self in that position is not only pardonable but absolutely imperative. His first letters, too, and the change of his sentiments towards his uncle, are very artfully managed; and, in fact, throughout the book one is constantly surprised by the evidence that Smollett, when he chose, was perfectly competent to attend to those minutiae of the craftsman which, in his earlier work, he has so constantly and, to some extent, so unfortunately neglected. Perhaps the letter-form helped him; it is at any rate certain that such an episode as that in which Quin makes his appearance is presented with an infinitely better grace, as well as more naturally, than the numerous similar episodes in all the other books.

Still, without the really immortal quartette above



referred to, *Humphry Clinker* could never have attained or held the reputation which has been, and is justly, its portion. I am not quite certain about the truth of the very generally held opinion that Matthew, like Roderick, is an autobiographical study. If he be, all that can be said is that nobody could have expected the original of the one to develop into the original of the other. Some faint personal touches—intended to show the effect of not very severe ill-health and of age mellowing and refining a generous but somewhat rough disposition—there may be. But the excellent Squire only very remotely tallies with the descriptions which Smollett has almost avowedly given of himself in the dedication of *Fathom* and in the “S” passages of this very novel. There is no evidence either in his books or in tradition that he ever had the whimsicality of Bramble; while unluckily there was no need for him to suffer from Bramble’s hypochondria, seeing that he had very authentic and unimaginary ailments of his own. Anyhow, if Bramble was his idealised portrait of himself in age, it shows much better taste in him than if Roderick was his idealised portrait of himself in youth. For the Squire, apart from a slight propensity to nauseous hygienic detail, is an altogether charming person. His very hypochondria is hit off to the life, without a grain of exaggeration or shortcoming; his fits of rage, even when they take what seems to the modern man such an unreasonable form as the quarrel with Lord “Oxmington”, are comic without being senile and ridiculous; his benevolence is not, as eighteenth century benevolence even in Fielding’s hands is wont to

be, goody and copybooky; he has what I think is nowhere to be found in Smollett except in this book, an almost Shakespearean touch of sureness, completeness, self-sufficingness. You can laugh at him without the very faintest feeling of contempt; admire him without the faintest tendency to yawn. He is distinctly and far away the cock of his own school of character; and Dickens, who constantly played at him in different forms, from Mr. Pickwick to Mr. Jarndyce, never could get near him.

The affection with which one regards his sister is naturally of a different kind. I have noted the earlier stages of Smollett's attempt at this personage; and it must be admitted that the farce and burlesque which were prominent in them are not entirely absent from Tabitha. Yet Smollett has, to a very great extent, got these things into subjection and digestion, and has administered the humaner touches absolutely necessary to save the character from being disgusting with the same singular advance in craftsmanship which has been noted above in other matters. It is conveyed to us very well that, despite Tabby's abominable greed, meanness, spite, harsh judgment, and so forth, she has an affection for her brother which is by no means wholly interested. Her husband-hunting has the excuse that fate and humanity have really been rather cruel to her young affections; though both were cruel only to be kind, and reserved her for a mate infinitely better suited to her than any other human being could have been. And for those who, without caring to look into these details, only want "humours", no character in all Smollett's

work provides them better. I do not know whether it is idle critical fancy, but it seems to me that there is a just respect of character in her very misspelling, that the malapropisms and the heterography of mistress and maid are differentiated with a just and masterly precision.

The amiable Win herself is certainly the very princess of misspellers. Neither Mrs. Harris before nor Mr. Yellowplush after her is quite her equal; while the subtle fashion in which she caricatures in due "below-stairs" degree the foibles of both her mistresses—the vapours and languishments of Lydia, no less than Tabitha's little meannesses and vices—must excite a really immense respect in anyone who will give himself the small trouble necessary to take notice of it. Even her broadest touches are scarcely offensive, just as her silliest are not unnatural; and obvious as is the condescension of her final epistle to the once familiar friend Mary Jones, its obviousness should not blind us to the absolute perfection of its accomplishment. The positive delicacy of her quotation of the praise of herself as "the very moral of Lady Rickmanstone, *but not so pale*", promises excellently for her chances in that "higher spear" to which she was removed, and in which one would like to have seen her.

By many judges, including not a few good ones, Lieutenant Obadiah Lismahago has been, I believe, set at the very head of Smollett's creations or observations. I cannot myself accord him this very highest place, which seems to me to be due to his brother-in-law. But considering that the two belong to distinctly

different classes, and that it is a mistake to remove anything from its own class, I should not be disinclined to bracket them. Lismahago is directly comparable with his brethren of the other service whom Smollett had drawn earlier; and I think he has the advantage of them. It would be a very bold word to say that Lismahago entirely transcends caricature; and it is a remnant of this weakness in him which puts him below his spiritual descendant, but perhaps fleshly and temporal ancestor, Captain Dugald Dalgetty. But the caricature in him is distinctly more subdued, or the original was less out of the common way than in Trunnion or even in Bowling; the lieutenant is in more than lineage and pretension a gentleman; and then (as some Scottish friends of mine would doubtless remind me if I forgot it) he is a Scotsman and not an Englishman. Smollett, hard and little transcendental as was his nature, could here, in his "Land of Beulah", discern and reproduce the peculiar madness, not at all devoid of fineness, which we find in the living and historical Sir Thomas Urquhart, as well as in a whole group of Sir Walter's inventions.

Scott tells us that there was, and that he himself had known, a Lismahago in the flesh whom tradition asserted to have sat for his portrait—unwittingly, I should suppose, or the distance to Leghorn, and the too short interval between the appearance of the book and the novelist's death, can alone have prevented him from leaving the arms of Tabitha to demand the satisfaction of a gentleman. Scott does not seem to have attached much credence to the rumour; but perhaps more

minute, if less genial, critics may note in Lismahago precisely that vividness of delineation in some respects, and that falling short of complete combination of the universal and the individual in others, which they might expect in a personage of Smollett's, if he had a distinct model before him. But these are trifles. There is nothing else trifling about Lismahago. The unflinching cross-grainedness which forbids him to allow anyone to pity him, or even to be indignant at his lack of fortune; the wild-cat irascibility which, after he had taken up Bramble's quarrel with Lord Oxmington on his own responsibility as second, makes him desirous to shift the quarrel to Bramble himself as more attainable than the real author of his disgrace; nay, the very eccentricity, not wholly ignoble, of the suit to Tabitha, where the cupidity of a fortune-hunter is combined with the daring of a knight-errant who attempts a "loathly" lady—all these things are really great in their curious way. From the prefatory revelations of Mr. Jonathan Dust, it may be inferred that the softening of Lismahago's temper effected by his good fortune was not unnaturally permanent or universal; and there must have been some curious adventures between him and the Cambrian gentry among whom his marriage introduced him.

It cannot be in the least necessary to give, in relation to this book, the sort of running commentary or irregular argument which seemed likely to be useful in regard to some of the others. Nobody who is fitted by nature to enjoy *Humphry Clinker* at all is likely to find the very least difficulty in reading it through. There are no "dry places" in it; and the mere apparatus of

the story is provided wholly by the loves—rather “vapid vegetable loves”—of Lydia and her Wilson and the *anagnorisis* of Clinker. But these things do not play anything like part enough in the novel to be irritating or wearisome. With no writer of novels do we part in such grateful and admiring good temper as with Smollett. “Nothing is here for tears; nothing to mourn.” It is excessively improbable that if he had lived twenty years longer, he would ever have done anything so good; it is quite certain that he could never possibly have done anything better. *Humphry Clinker* is nearly the furthest possible of the novel of humours, the novel of pure unromantic adventure, the novel, if not exactly of “gossip” (that does not seem to me quite the right word), of cheerful divagation from pillar to post without any troublesome attention to an elaborate plot, with hardly any purpose, with no tragic appeal, and without in its comedy any elaborate satire or analysis of human motive and action.

That, despite these “withouts”, these negatives, these abstentions from the most arduous paths, it attains such a height of truth, of merriment, of cheerful and yet sharp-sighted criticism of life, shows, as perhaps nothing else in his work does, that its author was not a mere man of talent; that he was a man of genius; and that, like love, genius will always find out its way, unless the stars are more than commonly inauspicious, or the man more than usually wanting to himself and his fate. Smollett was not so wanting. If not exactly a fine, he was a stout and brave nature, with nothing craven, little morbid, and nothing at all rotten about

him. And I really do not know that in the history of literature there are many pleasanter pieces of poetical justice than the way in which the Muses rewarded this sturdy soldier-of-all-work of theirs by letting him fall in the very moment of victory, a Nelson of the Picaresque Novel.

1895

## STERNE

### INTRODUCTION (1898)

It can hardly be said that Sterne was an unfortunate person during his lifetime, though he seems to have thought himself so. His childhood was indeed a little necessitous, and he died early, and in debt, after some years of very bad health. But from the time when he went to Cambridge, things went on the whole very fairly well with him in respect of fortune; his ill-health does not seem to have caused him much disquiet; his last ten years gave him fame, flirting, wandering, and other pleasures and diversions to his heart's content; and his debts only troubled those he left behind him. He delighted in his daughter; he was able to get rid of his wife, when he was more than usually *fatigatus et aegrotus* of her, with singular ease. During the unknown, or almost unknown, middle of his life he had friends of the kind most congenial to him; and both in his time of preparation and his time of production in literature, he was able to indulge his genius in a way by no means common with men of letters. If his wish to die in a certain manner and circumstance was only bravado—and borrowed bravado—still it was granted; and it is quite certain that to him an old age of real illness would have been unmitigated torture. Even if we admit the ghastly stories of the fate of his remains, there was very



little reason why anyone should not have anticipated Mr. Swinburne's words on the morrow of Sterne's death and said, "Oh! brother, the gods were good to you", though even then he might have said it with a sort of mental reservation on the question whether Sterne had been very good to the gods.

Nemesis, for the purpose of adjusting things, played him the exceptionally savage trick of using the intervention of his idolised daughter. Little or nothing seems to be known of "Lydia Sterne de Medalle", as she was pleased to sign herself; "Mrs. Medalle", as her bluff British contemporaries call her. But that she must have been either a very silly, a very stupid, or an excessively callous person, appears certain. It would seem, indeed, to require a combination of the flightiness and lack of taste which her father too often displayed, with the stolidity which (from rather unfair inference through Mrs. Shandy) is sometimes supposed to have characterised her mother, to prompt or permit a daughter to publish such a collection of letters as those which were first given to the world in 1775. Charity, not unsupported by probability, has trusted that Madame de Medalle could not read Latin, but she certainly could read English; and only an utterly corrupted heart, or an incurably dense or feather-brained head, could hide from her the fact that not a few of the English letters she published were damaging to her father's character. Her alleged excuse—that her mother, who was then dead, had desired her, if any letters should be published under her father's name, to publish these, and that the "Yorick and Eliza" correspondence had appeared—is utterly

insufficient. For Mrs. Sterne, of whose conduct we know nothing unfavourable, and one or two things decidedly to her credit, could only have meant "such of these as will put your father in a favourable light", else she would have published them herself. Yet though Lydia could, while taking no editorial trouble whatever, go out of her way to make a silly missish apology for publishing a passage in which her charms and merits are celebrated, she seems never to have given a thought to what she was doing in other ways. Nor were Sterne's misfortunes in this way over with the publication of these things; for the subsequently discovered Fourmentelle correspondence sunk him, with precise judges, a little deeper. No doubt *Tristram Shandy*, the *Sentimental Journey*, and the curious stories or traditions about their author, were not exactly calculated to give Sterne a very high reputation with grave authorities. But it is these unlucky letters which put him almost hopelessly out of court. Even the slight relenting of fortune which gave him at last, in Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, a biographer very good-natured, very indefatigable, and with a natural genius for detecting undiscovered facts and documents, only made matters worse in some ways. And the consequence is, that it has become a commonplace and almost a necessity to make up for praising Sterne's genius by damning his character. Johnson, while declining to deny him ability, seems to have been too much disgusted to talk freely about him; Scott's natural kindliness, warm admiration for my Uncle Toby, and total freedom from squeamish prudery, seem yet to have left him ill at ease and tongue-tied in discuss-

ing Sterne; Thackeray, as is well known, exceeded all measure in denouncing him; and his chief recent critical biographer, Mr. Traill, who is probably as free from cant, Britannic or other, as any man who ever wrote in English, speaks his mind in the most unsparing fashion.

For my own part, I do not hesitate to say that I do not think letters of this kind ought to be published at all; and though it may seem paradoxical or foolish, I am by no means sure that, if they are published, they ought to be admitted as evidence. That which is not written for the public, is no business of the public's; and I never read letters of this kind, published for the first time, without feeling like an eavesdropper.<sup>1</sup> Unluckily, the evidence furnished by the letters fits in only too well with that furnished by the published works, by his favourite cronies and companions, and by his general reputation, so that "what the prisoner says" must, no doubt, "be used against him".

It may be doubted whether it was accident or his usual deliberate fantasticality that made Sterne, in the well-known summary of his life which (very late in it) he drew up for his daughter, devote almost the whole space to his childhood. Perhaps it may be accounted for, reasonably enough, by supposing that of his later years he thought his daughter knew quite as much as he wished her to know, while of the middle period he had little or nothing to tell. In fact, of the two earlier divi-

<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps barely necessary to observe that the parallel does not extend to a further parallel between republication and tale-bearing. Once published, the thing is public.

sions we still know very little but what he has chosen to tell us in one of the most characteristic and not the least charming excursions of his pen. Laurence Sterne was, with two sisters, the only "permanent child" (to borrow a pleasant phrase of Mr. Traill's) out of a very plentiful but most impermanent family, borne in the most inconvenient circumstances possible by Agnes Nuttle or Herbert or Sterne, a widow, and daughter or step-daughter of a sutler of our army in Flanders, to Roger, second son of Simon Sterne of Elvington, in Yorkshire, who was the third son of Dr. Richard Sterne, Archbishop of York. The Sternes were of a gentle if not very distinguished family, which, after being seated in Suffolk, migrated to Nottinghamshire. After the promotion of the archbishop (who had been a stout Cavalier, as Master of Jesus at Cambridge, in the bad times), they obtained, as was fitting, divers establishments by marriage or benefice in Yorkshire itself. Very little endowment of any kind, however, fell to the lot of Roger Sterne, who was an ensign in what ranked later as the 34th Regiment. Laurence, his eldest son, was born at Clonmel, in Ireland, where his mother's relations lived, and just after his father's regiment had been disbanded. It was shortly re-established, however, and became the most "marching" of all marching corps; for though its headquarters were generally in Ireland, it was constantly being ordered elsewhere, and Roger Sterne saw active service both at Vigo and Gibraltar. In this latter station he fought a duel of an extremely Shandean character "about a goose". He was run through the body and pinned to the wall; whereupon, it is said, he requested

his antagonist to be so kind as to wipe the plaster off the sword before pulling it out of his body. In despite of this thoughtfulness, however, and of an immediate recovery, the wound so weakened him that, being ordered to Jamaica, he took fever and died there in March 1731. As Laurence had been born on November 24, 1713, he was nearly eighteen; and the family had meanwhile been increased by four other children, who all died, and a youngest daughter, Catherine, who, like the eldest, Mary, lived. Till he was about nine or ten the boy followed the exceedingly fluctuating fortunes of his family, which he diversified further on by falling through, not a millrace, but a going mill. Then he was sent to school at Halifax, in Yorkshire, and soon after practically adopted by his cousin Sterne of Elvington, who, when the time came, sent him to Jesus College at Cambridge, the family connection with which had begun with his great-grandfather. He was admitted there on July 6, 1733, being then nearly twenty, and took his degree of B.A. in 1736, and that of M.A. in 1740. The only tradition of his school career is his own story that, having written his name on the school ceiling, he was whipped by the usher, but complimented as a "boy of genius" by the master, who said the name should never be effaced. This anecdote, as might be expected, has not escaped the *aqua fortis* of criticism.

We know practically nothing of Sterne's Cambridge career except the dates above mentioned, the fact of his being elected first to a sizarship and then as founder's kin to a scholarship endowed by Archbishop Sterne, and the incident told by himself that he there con-

tracted his lifelong friendship with a distant relative and fellow Jesus man, John Hall, or John Hall Stevenson, of whom more presently. But Sterne had further reason to acknowledge that his family stood together. He had no sooner taken his degree than he was taken up by a brother of his father's, Jaques Sterne, a great pluralist in the diocese of York, a very busy and masterful person, and a strong Whig and Hanoverian. Under his care, Sterne took deacon's orders in March 1736 at the hands of the Bishop of Lincoln; and as soon as, two years later, he had been ordained priest, he was appointed to the living of Sutton-on-the-Forest, eight miles from York. The uncle and nephew some years later quarrelled bitterly—according to the latter's account, because he would not write "dirty paragraphs in the newspapers", being "no party man". That Sterne would have been particularly squeamish about what he wrote may be doubted; but it is certain that he shows no partisan spirit anywhere, and very little interest in politics as such. However, for some years his uncle was certainly his active patron, and obtained for him two prebends and some other special preferments in connection with the diocese and chapter of York, so that he became, as *Tristram* shows, intimately acquainted with cathedral society there.

It has been a steady rule in the Anglican Church (if not, as in the Greek, a *sine quâ non*) that when a man has been provided with a living, he should, if he has not done so before, provide himself with a wife; and Sterne was a very unlikely man to break good custom in this respect. Very soon at least after his ordination he fell in love with Elizabeth Lumley, a young lady of a good

Yorkshire family, and of some little fortune, which, however, for a time she thought "not enough" to share with him, but which, as she told him during a fit of illness, she left to him in her will. On the strength of two quite unauthenticated and, I believe, not now traceable portraits seen by this or that person in printshops or elsewhere, she is said to have been plain. Certain expressions in Sterne's letters seem to imply that she had a rather exasperatingly steady and not too intelligent will of her own; and some twenty or five-and-twenty years after the marriage, M. Tollot, a gossiping Frenchman, with French ideas on the duty of husbands and wives going separate ways, said that she wished to have a finger in every pie, and pestered "the good and agreeable Tristram" with her presence. But Sterne, despite his reckless confessions of conjugal indifference, and worse, says nothing serious or even ill-natured of her; and one or two traits and sayings of hers, especially her refusal to listen to a meddlesome person who wished to tell her tales about "Eliza", seem to argue sense and dignity. That in the latter years she cared little to be with a husband who had long been "tired and sick" of her, is not to her discredit. Their daughter, with the almost invariable ill-luck or ill-judgment which seems to have attended her, printed certain letters of this courtship time, though she gave nothing for many years afterwards. The use made of these Strephon or Damon blandishments, in contrast with the expressions used by the writer of his wife, and of other women, long afterwards, is perhaps a little unfair; but it must be admitted that though far too characteristic and amusing to be

omitted, they are anything but brilliant specimens of their kind. In particular, Thackeray's bitter fun on the ineffably lackadaisical passage, "My L. has seen a polyanthus blow in December", is pretty fully justified.

If, however, the marriage, which, difficulties being removed, took place on Easter Monday, March 30, 1741, did not bring lasting happiness to Sterne, it probably brought him some at the time, and it certainly brought him an accession of fortune; for in addition to what little money Miss Lumley had, a friend of hers bestowed the additional living of Stillington on her husband. These various sources of income must have made a tolerable revenue, which, after the publication of *Tristram*, was further supplemented by yet another benefice given him by Lord Falconbridge at Coxwold, a living of no great value, but a pleasant place of residence. Add to this the profits of his books in the last eight years of his life, which were for that day considerable, and it will be seen that, as has been said above, Sterne might have been much worse off in this world's goods than he was. He seems, like other people, to have made some rather costly experiments in farming; and his way of life latterly, what with his own journeys and sojourns in London, and the long separate residence of his wife and daughter in France, was expensive. But he complains little of poverty; and though he died in debt, much of that debt was due to no fault of his, but to the burning of the parsonage of Sutton.

It is all the more remarkable in one way, though the absence of any pressure of want may explain it in another, that Sterne's great literary gifts should have



remained so long without finding any kind of literary expression, unless it was in the newspaper way, in respect to which he first obliged and afterwards dis-obliged his uncle. There is, I believe, no dispute about the fact that he distances, and that by many years, every other man of letters of anything like his rank—except Cowper, whose affliction puts him out of comparison—in the lateness of his fruiting time. All but a quarter of a century had passed since he took his degree when *Tristram Shandy* appeared; and, putting sermons aside, the very earliest thing of his known, *The History of a Warm Watch-Coat*, only antedated *Tristram* by two years or rather less. He was no doubt “making himself all this time”; but the making must have been an uncommonly slow process. Nor did he, like a good many writers, occupy the time in preparing what he was afterwards to publish, unless in the case of a few of his sermons. It is positively known that *Tristram* was written merely as it was published, and the *Journey* likewise. Nor is even the first by any means a long book. It is as nearly as possible the same length as Fielding’s *Amelia* when printed straight on; and even then more allowance has to be made, not merely for its free and audacious plagiarisms, but for its constantly broken paragraphs, stars, dashes, and other trickeries. If it were possible to squeeze it up, as one squeezes a sponge, into the solid texture of an ordinary book, I doubt whether it would be very much longer than *Joseph Andrews*.

It will probably be admitted, however, that the idiosyncrasy of the writings of Sterne’s last and incomplete decade, even if it be in part only an idiosyncrasy of

mannerism, is almost great enough to justify the nearly three decades of *Lehrjahre* (starting from his entrance at Cambridge) which preceded it. It is true that of the actual occupations of these years we know extremely little—indeed, what we know as distinguished from what is guess-work and inference is mostly summed up by Sterne's own current and curvetting pen, thus: "I remained near twenty years at Sutton, doing duty at both places [*i.e.*, Sutton and Stillington]. I had then very good health. Books, painting, fiddling, and shooting were my amusements"; to which he adds only that he and the squire of Sutton were not very good friends, but that at Stillington the Croft family were extremely kind and amiable. From other sources, including, it is true, his own letters—though the dates and allusions of these are so uncertain that they are very doubtful guides—we find that his chief crony during this period, as during his life, was the already-mentioned John Hall, who had taken to the name of Stevenson, and was master of Skelton Castle, a very old and curious house on the border of the Cleveland moors, not far from the town of Guisborough. The master of "Crazy" Castle—he liked to give his house this name, which he afterwards used in entitling his book of *Crazy Tales*—his ways and his library, have usually been charged with debauching Sterne's innocent mind, which I should imagine lent itself to that process in a most docile and *morigerant* fashion; but whether this was the case or not, it is clear that Stevenson bore no very good reputation. It is not certain, but was asserted, that he had been a monk of Medmenham. He gathered about him at

Skelton a society which, though no such imputations were made on it as on that of Wilkes and Dashwood, was of a pretty loose kind; he was a humourist, both in the old and the modern sense; and his *Crazy Tales* were, if not very mad, rather sad and bad exercises of the imagination.

Amid all this dream- and guess-work, almost the only solid facts in Sterne's life are the births of two daughters, one in 1745 and the other two years later. Both were christened Lydia; the first died soon after she was born, the second lived to be the darling of both her parents, the object of the most respectable emotions of Sterne's life, the wife of an unknown Frenchman, M. de Medalle, and, as has been said, the probably unwitting destroyer of her father's last chance of reputation.

Our exuberant nescience in matters Sternian extends up to the very publication of *Tristram*, as far as the determining causes of its production are concerned. It is true that in passages of the letters Sterne seems to say that his experiment with the pen was prompted by a desire to make good some losses in farming, and elsewhere that he was tired of employing his brains for other people's advantage, as he had done for some years for an ungrateful person, that is to say, his uncle. This last passage was written just before *Tristram* came out; but at no time was Sterne a very trustworthy reporter of his own motives, and it would seem that the quarrel with his uncle must have been a good deal earlier. At any rate, the year 1759 seems to have been spent in writing the first two volumes of the book, and *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, published by

John Hinxham, Stonegate, York, but obtainable also from divers London booksellers, appeared on the 1st of January 1760. I wish Sterne had thought of keeping it till the 1st of April, which he would probably then have done.

The comparatively short last scenes of his life were as busy and varied as his long middle course had been outwardly monotonous. Although his book was nominally published at York, he had gone up to London to superintend arrangements for its sale there, perhaps not without a hope of triumph. If so, Fortune chose not to play him her usual tricks. In York, the extreme personality of the book excited interest of a two-fold and dubious kind; but, to play on some words of Dryden's, "London liked grossly" and swallowed *Tristram Shandy* whole with singular avidity. Its author came to town just in time to enjoy the results of this, and was one of the chief lions of the season of 1760, a position which he enjoyed with a childish frankness that is not the least pleasant thing in his history. One, probably of the least important, though by accident one of the best known of his innumerable flirtations, with a Miss Fourmentelle, was apparently quenched by this distraction when it was on the point of going such lengths that the lady had actually come up alone to London to meet Sterne there. He was introduced to persons as different as Garrick and Warburton, from the latter of whom he received, in rather mysterious circumstances, a present of money. He haunted Ministers and Knights of the Garter; he was overwhelmed with invitations and callers; and, as has been said, he received one very solid

present in the shape of the living of Coxwold. *Tristram* went into a second edition rapidly; its author was enabled to announce a collection of "*Sermons* by Mr. Yorick" in April; and he went to his new living in the early summer, determined to set to work vigorously on more of the work that had been so fortunate. By the end of the year he was ready with two more volumes, again came up to town, and again, when vols. iii. and iv. had appeared, at the end of January 1761, was besieged by admirers. For these two he received £380 from Dodsley, who had fought shy of the book earlier. They were quite as successful as the first pair; and again Sterne stayed all the spring and earlier summer in London, returning to Yorkshire to make more *Shandy* in the autumn. He was still quicker over the third batch, and it was published in December 1761, when he was again in town; but he now meditated a longer flight. His health had been really declining, and he obtained leave from the archbishop for a year certain, and perhaps two, that he might go to the south of France. He was warmly received in Paris, where his work had obtained a popularity which it has never wholly lost, and the framework of fact (including the passport difficulties) for the *Sentimental Journey*, as well as for the seventh volume of *Tristram*, was laid during the spring. His plans were now changed, it being determined that his wife and daughter (who had inherited his constitution) should join him. They did so after some difficulties, and the consumptive novelist, having spent all the winter in one of the worst climates in Europe, that of the French capital, started with his family in the torrid heats of

July for Toulouse, where at last they were established about the middle of August.

Toulouse became Sterne's abode for nearly a year, his headquarters for a somewhat longer period, and the home of his wife and daughter, with migrations to Bagnères, Montpellier, and a great many other places in France, for about five years. He himself—he had been ill at Toulouse, and worse at Montpellier—reached England again (after a short stay in Paris) during the early summer of 1764. Nor was it till January 1765 that the seventh and eighth volumes of *Tristram* appeared. As usual, Sterne went to town to receive the congratulations of the public, which seem to have been fairly hearty; for though the instalment immediately preceding had not been an entire success, the longer interval had now had its effect, not merely on the art and materials of the caterer, but on the appetite of his guests. He followed this up with two more volumes of *Sermons*, of a much more characteristic kind than his earlier venture in this way, and published partly by subscription. These, however, were not actually issued till 1766. Meanwhile, in October 1765, Sterne had set out for his second attempt in travel on the Continent, which was to supply the remaining material for the *Sentimental Journey*, and to be prolonged as far as Naples. Little is known of his winter stay at that city and in Rome. On his way homeward he met his wife and daughter in Franche-Comté, but, at Mrs. Sterne's request, left them there and went on alone to Coxwold.

He reached England in extremely bad health, and never left it again; but he had still nearly two years of

fairly well filled life to run. The ninth, or last, volume of *Tristram* occupied him during the autumn of 1766, and was produced, with the invariable accompaniment of its author's appearance in London, during January 1767. This visit, which lasted till May, saw the flirtation with "Eliza" Draper, the young wife of an Indian official, who was at home for her health: an affair which exalted Sterne in the eyes of eighteenth-century sensibility, especially in France, about as much as it has depressed him in the eyes not merely of the propriety, not merely of the common sense, but of the romance of later times. He was very ill when he got back to Coxwold, but recovered, and in October was joined by his wife and daughter. Even then, however, the community was a very temporary and divided one, for he took a house for them at York, and they were not to stay in England beyond the spring. He himself finished what we have of the *Sentimental Journey*, and went to London with it, where it was published rather later than usual, on February 27, 1768. Three weeks later its author, at his lodgings at 41 New Bond Street, in the presence only of a hired nurse and a footman, who had been sent by some of his friends to inquire after him, took a journey other than sentimental, and so far unreported. Some odd but not very well authenticated stories gathered round his death, which occurred on Friday the 18th March. It was said, and it is probable enough, that his gold sleeve-links were stolen by his landlady. After his uneral, scantily attended, at the burying-ground of St. George's, Hanover Square, opposite Hyde Park (which used to be known by the squalid

brown of its unrestored, and afterwards made more hideous by the bedizened red of its restored chapel), his body is said to have been snatched by resurrection-men. And the myth is rounded off by the addition that the remains, having been sold to the professor of anatomy at Cambridge, were dissected there in public, one of the spectators, a friend of Sterne's, recognising the face too late, and fainting.

His affairs, which had never been managed in a very business-like manner, were in considerable disorder. Some years before, the carelessness of his curate had caused or allowed the parsonage at Sutton to be burnt to the ground; and Sterne, besides losing valuable effects of his own, was of course liable for the rebuilding. He managed to put this off till his death, after which his widow and administratrix was sued for dilapidations. These, as she was in very poor circumstances, had to be compounded for sixty pounds only, but they probably ranked for a much larger sum in the £1100 at which Sterne's indebtedness was reckoned. His widow had a little money of her own: £800 was collected for her and her daughter at York races; there must have been profits from the copyrights; and a fresh collection of *Sermons* was issued by subscription. But though very little is known about the pair, they are said to have been ill off. They applied first to Wilkes and then to Stevenson to write a life of Sterne to prefix to his works, but neither complied. Mr. Fitzgerald, who seldom deserves the curse laid on those who use harsh judgment, is very severe on both for this. Yet surely each, considering his own reputation, must have felt that he was the last



person to set Sterne right with the stricter part of society, and that to write a "Crazy" or "Shandean" life of him would be a cruel crime. It is not known exactly when Lydia married, or when either she or her mother died. Mrs. Sterne must have been dead by 1775, the date of the publication of the letters; Lydia is said to have perished in the French Revolution.

Beginning authorship very late in life, having schooled himself to an intensely artificial method, both in style and in construction, and not allowed by Fate more than a few years in which to write at all, Sterne, as is natural, displays a great uniformity throughout his work. Indeed, it might be said that he has written but one book, *Tristram Shandy*. The *Sentimental Journey* (as to the relative merits of which, compared with the earlier and larger work, there is a *polemos aspondos* between the Big-endians and the Little-endians of Sternism) is after all only an expansion of the seventh book of *Tristram* with *fioriture*, variations, and new divertissements. The sermon which occurs so early is an actual sermon of "Yorick's", and a sufficient specimen of his more serious concionatory vein; many, if not most, of his letters might have been twined into *Tristram* without being in the least degree more out of place than most of its actual contents. And so there is more propriety than depends upon the mere fact that *Tristram Shandy* is the earliest and the largest part of its author's work, not merely in making an introduction to it serve as an introduction to the whole of that work, but in making no extremely scholastic distinction between the specially Shandean and the generally Sternian

characteristics. For, indeed, all Sterne is in it more or less eminently.

No less a critic than M. Scherer has given his sanction to the idea that in Sterne we have a special, if not even *the* special, type of the humourist; and probably few people who have given no particular thought or attention to the matter would refuse to agree with him. I am myself inclined rather to a demur, or, at any rate, to a distinction, though few better things have been written about humour itself than a passage in M. Scherer's essay on our author. Sterne has no doubt in a very eminent degree the sense of contrast, which all the best critics admit to be the root of humour—the note of the humourist. But he has it partially, occasionally, and, I should even go as far as to say, not *greatly*. The *great* English humourists, I take it, are Shakespeare, Swift, Fielding, Thackeray, and Carlyle. All these—even Fielding, whose eighteenth-century manner, the contemporary and counterpart of Sterne's, cannot hide the truth—apply the humourist contrast, the humourist sense of the irony of existence, to the great things, the *prima et novissima*. They see, and feel, and show the simultaneous sense of Death and Life, of Love and Loss, of the Finite and the Infinite. Sterne stops a long way short of this; *les grands sujets lui sont défendus* in another sense than La Bruyère's. It is scarcely too much to say that his ostentatious preference for the *bagatelle* was a real and not in the least affected fact. Nowhere, not in the true pathos of the famous deathbed letter to Mrs. James, not in the, as it seems to me, by no means wholly true pathos of the Le Fever episode,

does he pierce to "the accepted hells beneath". He has an unmatched command of the lesser and lower varieties of the humorous contrast—over the odd, the petty, the queer, above all, over what the French untranslatably call the *saugrenu*. His forte is the foible; his *cheval de bataille*, the hobby-horse. If you want to soar into the heights or plunge into the depths of humour, Sterne is not for you. But if you want what his own generation called a frisk on middle—*very* middle—earth, a hunt in curiosity-shops (especially of the technically "curious" description), a peep into all manner of *coulisses* and behind-scenes of human nature, a ride on a sort of intellectual switchback, a view of moral, mental, religious, sentimental dancing of all the kinds that have delighted man, from the rope to the skirt, then have with Sterne in any direction he pleases. He may sometimes a very little disgust you, but you will seldom have just cause to complain that he disappoints and deceives.

## INTRODUCTION (1926)

When, more than thirty years ago, the present writer contributed some introductory matter to the present publishers' six-volume edition of Sterne, he spoke about "our exuberant nescience in matters Sternian". The phrase, I think, was quarrelled with as to form by a sensitive reviewer or two; but nobody at the moment could have denied its truth as fact. It so happened, however, in accordance with the famous saying about the fates of books—which certainly includes those of

the writers of books—that this nescience was just about to be largely invaded by new knowledge on the biographical, if not exactly on the literary, side. And about half-way between that date and the present day came a small shelf-ful of books devoted to the working-up of this. Early in the time came the publication of some matter concerned with the relationship of Mrs. Sterne to that Princess of blue-stockings Mrs. Montagu, and Sterne's own correspondence with her, while oddments of all kinds, chiefly letters of references in letters, dropped in. But by far the most important acquisition followed on the bequest to the British Museum of the singular and untraceable, but apparently beyond doubt genuine, collection of Mr. Gibbs of Bath—containing the *Journal to Eliza* and other matters which had, as a fact, been communicated to Thackeray in the very middle of the nineteenth century, which had I think beyond doubt (though there is difference of opinion here) been to some extent considered by him, and had embittered his already existing dislike of Sterne; but the exact character of which was little known to anybody and not at all to most people. All this and more was worked up by Professor Cross in America, by the late Sir Sidney Lee for the *Dictionary of National Biography* in England, and by some others—this “working-up” including, by a thoroughly Shandean oddity, the “revendication” of some things which had previously been considered spurious. Now the desperate hook of the critic is often occupied in cutting off: his more sluggish needle is much less busy with patching on again.

With regard to one batch of the new matter, I may as well say at once that, after noticing it here, I shall rule it out altogether. It grieves me to speak harshly of any member of the family of the Crofts of Oporto, who have for two centuries provided England with some of the best of the liquor which has helped so mightily to make her England. Of the chief contemporary of that family, Stephen Croft, neighbour and good friend to Sterne at Stillington, there is no harm to say. But Stephen's brother John tittle-tattled in his later days to Caleb Whitefoord and otherwise a good deal of stuff about "Yorick" which is obviously spiteful, which almost confesses itself to be second- (or further) hand, and which I venture to regard as almost to the last degree untrustworthy. John was a mere child (he was born in 1732) when Sterne came to Stillington; he left early to join the business in Portugal; when he came back, he admits that he found Sterne "much taken up in the gay world", which "made a wide gap in [their] intimacy". If anybody fails to see in that single sentence at least two powerful reasons for doubting this extremely belated<sup>1</sup> testimony, he lacks somewhat of deaconship in the craft of criticism. This Croft became an "antiquary", and is said to have written "Annotations on Plays of Shakespeare". I have not been able to get hold of them: but I strongly suspect that they would scarcely have raised my opinion of their author. Meanwhile, if anybody expects me to

<sup>1</sup> It seems to have been given quite towards the end of the century, nearly thirty years after Sterne's death, and over fifty after his moving to Stillington.

believe<sup>1</sup> that Sterne, springing a covey of birds on his way to church, went back for his gun and left his congregation pastorless, I reply that he may of course do so if he likes. I prefer less Bardolphian security, especially as one sees at once that this is exactly what would be said of an oddity like Yorick—nay, that the origin might be somebody's saying, "Why, Sterne *would*", etc. And when we go on to hear that the Sternes "sold their butter cheaper than their neighbour"—why, really, you know!

There is, however, one piece of this scandalmongering which, at the very moment when it shows how utterly untrustworthy the scandalmonger is,<sup>2</sup> has intrinsic interest. Croft says of the marriage: "She asked him the question herself, and they went off directly from the Rooms and were married". How, exactly, you can "go off from Rooms" on Easter Monday morning and get the Dean of York to marry you off-hand in the Minster (these are the hard facts of the case) John does not explain. But that Elizabeth, not Laurence, finally "popped" is not impossible: and would be (as she had refused him earlier) by no means atrociously "forward". In any case the item may lead us to one of the two most interesting points, besides that of Sterne's own idiosyncrasy, personal and literary, on which the once new matter threw new light. The second of these,

<sup>1</sup> It is fair to Croft to add (as has not always been added) that he gives this as an "idle tale".

<sup>2</sup> He seems to have been as bad a critic as he was a witness; he thought it "a pity that Goldsmith did not write more in verse than in prose".

as we shall take them in order, is the character of "Eliza": the first is that of "Elizabeth" herself.

There has been something of a tendency, even in those who by no means ignore Sterne's own faults, to be rather hard on his wife. She was ill-tempered; she was stupid;<sup>1</sup> she didn't understand him; she didn't enjoy the chapters of *Tristram* that he read to her; she kept his daughter away from him; she travelled extravagantly; I don't know how many dreadful things she did, besides being never pretty, for a short time out of her senses, and for a much longer time ill. Now of course all these—especially the last three—are terrible faults in a wife: and her letter-writing to Mrs. Montagu—her own relation—probably does show that she had a somewhat touchy and complaining temperament, which was perhaps not likely to be soothed or sweetened by some of the characteristics of her "good and agreeable" husband—as his French friend called him. But the total of the "Add. MSS."—if one may borrow the technical title for a section to which it is specially appropriate—makes me, perhaps from contrariness, think rather better than worse of her.

A wife who can behave irreproachably when her husband is by his own confession *fatigatus et aegrotus* of her must be, to translate and adjust Greek after quoting Latin, "either a goddess or a beastess": and poor Elizabeth Lumley or Sterne appears to have been a very human creature. She had her trials: but as she was

<sup>1</sup> Here John Croft is not wholly accusative; for he speaks of credit given to her for helping Sterne in his work. But, you see, this *discredits* Sterne himself.

certainly and for no short time at first "in love" (as that husband pretty certainly never was with anyone), and by another hardly less ungracious confession of his "almost in love" again with him at last, people have been known to be more unfortunate. As to her looks, the eyes of the accepted portrait (which by the way is hopelessly irreconcilable with the hideous caricature sometimes accounted for an extra sin to Sterne) are by no means commonplace. Something more may be said about her presently when we come to her rival—something that will also concern her daughter. Of Madame "Lydia Sterne de Medalle" herself little new seems to have turned up, except that the old traditions of her "looking through the little window" have been removed and death is said to have come to her in a more ordinary and unghastly fashion, before the Revolution broke out. One knows so little about her beyond her most unfortunate intermeddlings with the difficult art of editing dead people's letters, that the general opinion of her may be unjust. The reference to her in Mrs. Draper's remarkable rigmarole (vide *infra*) has, I confess, rather raised my opinion of her: while John Croft's tale about a school-girl prank of hers has certainly not lowered it.

But neither it nor anything else has raised, though it has largely furnished and fortified, that opinion as it concerns Mrs. Draper herself. Until nearly or quite the close of the nineteenth century, the idea of "Sterne's Eliza" existing in all but a very few exceptionally and almost accidentally well-informed minds was exceedingly shadowy. We knew very little about



her; and though, as reflected in what we did know, she seemed to have been a rather extreme example of "sensibility", it was chiefly as an object, half-fantastic, of that not wholly *amabilis insania*, that one thought of her. She was probably not "guilty" in the strictly technical sense: but one did not envy Mr. Draper.

As far as the said "guilt" goes, the new matter leaves her—in respect of Sterne at least—certainly no worse, and indeed a good deal better, than before; there being in the *Journal* not merely positive assertions of innocence which would go for little, but indirect statements, not compatible with anything else, which go for much. For anything offensive in the *Journal* itself she is of course not responsible.<sup>1</sup> A scandalous story reported by Rogers as told of her by "Syntax" Combe—though Combe was not quite such a *mere* gutter-scribbling jail-bird as some people seem to think now—is not of much more importance than John Croft's tattle about Sterne. Mere association with Wilkes is not necessarily damning—did not even Johnson enjoy sitting next him at dinner? To be still charitable, if she did elope *from* a window *by* a rope-ladder, *to* a king's ship *with* the captain thereof who was *Sir* Somebody, could a victim of Sensibility in the late eighteenth century be expected to resist such a concatenation of temptations? Catherine Morland and Marianne Dashwood would not have done it, because they were both at heart good girls; Isabella Thorpe might not, because she was distinctly a business-like

<sup>1</sup> She may have received parts of it: but not the parts we have.

one. But all three would certainly have regarded it as almost the ideal of naughty felicity.

But though all this is quite true, and though Sir John Clark may have shown himself knightly according to medieval ideals and not baronetish in the eighteenth-century style by merely escorting this eloping angel to an uncle's house—nay, though that unlucky Draper, of whom nobody else has anything bad to say, while there is testimony in his favour, may have preferred some wicked "Mrs. Leeds" to her—"the tottle of the whole" I fear goes against Eliza, as a consequence of the extraordinary epistle to Mrs. James already referred to.

This, in more senses than one, "singular" composition—for if anything ever deserved the above-used word "rigmarole", it does; and in a fairly wide range of reading I never came across anything quite like it—seems to be the sole survivor of a larger correspondence. It is dated more than four years after Sterne's death: but of course at that time exchange of letters between England and India was not rapid. It is immensely long—on a rough cast-off nearer twenty than fifteen thousand words. It is self-excusatory throughout: and though "confuse" and "excuse" are two verbs as often found together in prose as in rhyme, the original action which Eliza excuses is certainly one which needs every excuse it can get, and can hardly get enough. It seems that Mrs. Draper had written, not to Mrs. Sterne but direct to Lydia, offering *her* a home, without reference to her mother: which amazing insult, to that mother *and* to herself, Miss Sterne seems to have treated in the manner it deserved, thus showing that she was not entirely

devoid of merit. The chief of the excuses which Eliza scatters through her letter, between huge digressions about things in general, is the outrageous one that she had heard reports "corroborated a thousand times from the lips of Yorick", that his wife was "occasionally a drunkard, a swearer and exceeding unchaste"! Now Sterne was nearly as *capable de tout* as Habakkuk: and we have enough, and a great deal too much, of unhusbandly language of his about his wife. But if he ever said anything at all justifying this particular batch of libels, I think I may say that it doesn't survive in published form. Anyhow, Eliza, after saying this, tells how she has given a certain Colonel Campbell, who was the bearer of an Indian subscription for the Sternes, a flaming introduction to them, praising to the skies the widow and daughter, of *both* of whom she says, in yet another place, she has heard "extremely disadvantageous reports"; and accompanies this by remarks to Mrs. James suggesting (you constantly do not know where to have Eliza beyond "suggestion") that this colonel of extraordinary merit may perhaps marry Lydia!

Indian officials of Eliza's time were not, I believe, troubled in their training (supposing that they had any) with that *précis* of which Sir George Trevelyan expressed becoming horror almost as many years ago as had then elapsed since her death. I should be sorry for the smartest of them if he had to treat this letter of hers in *précis*-fashion. It wobbles and wanders from her dislike to the Sternes and her changed feelings (for which one cannot wholly blame her) towards Sterne himself, to perhaps not affected anxieties about her

own daughter in England; through what the French would call a *tohu-bohu* of cattish remarks about Miss This and Miss That; deplorings of the artificial and insufficient education of young ladies destined for India; flattering observations about Mrs. Montagu; and what have been not altogether unreasonably taken as attempts to prove that *she* could be a blue-stocking if she were allowed to return once more to England and show her abilities; all mixed up with apologies to *Mrs.* James for having called her so, and attempts to compensate by calling her (to us hideously) "James" alone, etc.—ampersands being applicable almost *ad libitum*. But whether she did or did not know of the existence of the *Journal* is not, I think, quite clear. If she had even a suspicion of that existence, the evident "flutter of spirits" in which she writes, and her changed opinion of Sterne, would be more than excusable.

For it is one of the strangest of documents: though perhaps its full strangeness may not strike anybody who does not know or remember that a great part of it was composed *pari passu* with the *Sentimental Journey* itself, and who does not avail himself of the opportunity here given of comparing the two with this fact in mind. Once more, there is hardly a stranger or in a sense more edifying comparison to be found in literature—fertile as Apollo and Pallas have been between them (no scandal meant) of producing startling contrasts. But in a sense only, for neither document by itself can be called exactly edifying.

Without reviving the old controversies between *Tristramites* and *Journeymen*, one may say confidently

that *A Sentimental Journey* is its author's best work of art, and a singularly successful and complete work of art in itself. High art one may perhaps hardly call it; possibly Sterne himself, if his Greek had been a little more extensive and peculiar, might have called it rhyparographic, rhyographic, or even (using combinations of various readings) rhyparorhopostomatethic (the translation of which last, if anybody wants it, is "dirty—trivial—pattering") art. But it is perfect of its kind, and whether Sterne ever really intended to do another two volumes, on Italy, or not (it is hardly necessary to say that the title-page "does nothing to the affair"), it is quite certain that the thing as it stands is artistically complete. When the *fille de chambre* "came to seek God knows what ends" in that alley between the bedsteads and interrupted equally unknowable sequels, she interrupted the story once for all. The previous incidents, which may have looked like mere incidents or at best episodes without a main plot, seem to have really belonged to this—to have been strophes and antistrophes leading up to this epode. And they all, though in different degrees and ways, are equally finished things of their own kinds. In a rather extensive acquaintance with novels in several languages, I know few things better than:

" 'Then I solemnly declare', said the lady, blushing, 'that you have been making love to me all this while.' "

Though I should rather like to have had a word or two with the Reverend Laurence about that "blush"! If it existed at all, I think it was a very little one. But there are arguments on both sides: anyhow, the speech is a masterpiece, and, what is rare with Sterne,

is absolutely destitute of the slightest histrionic touch. If the scene ever happened, the words were spoken—on the earth, not on the boards.<sup>1</sup>

I was not sorry to see, especially as I had not read his work till after I had read and made up my mind about the *Journal*, that Professor Cross had anticipated to some extent my own view of it as far as the “contrast” goes. He and I should not always agree about matters Sternian, though no one has done more than he has to eke out our knowledge on the subject. In particular, I cannot agree with him in his assignment of Yorick’s “inconvenientness” to the score of his humour. That Sterne had humour—real humour—hardly the idlest paradoxer, or nobody *but* the idlest paradoxer—would think of denying. But when he meddled with what somebody calls “tumtedy” his Humour almost always deserted him, and left his Wit (a very different thing) to work its pleasure. Humour always laughs, however earnestly it feels, and sometimes chuckles: but it never sniggers. Sterne, with the rarest exceptions, is always sniggering when he is naughty. Now the snigger is a very unlovely thing. It was apparently unknown in antiquity—there is not a ghost of it even in Aristophanes, even in Lucian. You may perhaps trace its rise in the Greek anthology: but it is not clearly visible till it shows in Berni and others of the Italian Renaissance. There is none in Rabelais himself, nor in his immediate French successors: but it came into France later, and

<sup>1</sup> The *other*—the final—scene is sometimes said to be based on an actual adventure of Sterne’s friend Craufurd. But this gave nothing more than the *base*. The superstructure is “Sterne’s own”—in every sense.

Voltaire is of course the Prince of Sniggerers. The thing is, again, almost entirely unknown in England till the close of the seventeenth century: and even Prior has only touches of it. Swift is far too great for it. But Sterne, on the worse side of him, is compact of sniggers: the *Journey* itself of course dealing largely in them. They are in it, as it were, refined from their usual form in *Tristram*, and indeed almost quintessenced: though I am perfectly certain that Rabelais' own "La Quinte" would have used the "fair branch of fresh roses" that she bore to sweep them away and substitute a fragrance for their frowst. This, however, is partly a digression: though not at all an irrelevance.

The great point of interest lies in the fact that we know the *Journey* and the *Journal* to have been, in part at least, composed simultaneously, or as closely as anything, short of the sometimes-talked-of dictations to several clerks at once, will allow simultaneity. And the result is curious as few things are in literature. The *Journey*, as we also know (for we have a rough draft of part), was composed with the utmost care: and no doubt it owes to this care the evident and eminent artisticalness of it. But the *Journal* is the most confused and least artistic even of Sterne's eccentricities. Friendly judges have admitted—what I see very strongly—indications of at least slight aberration of intellect here and there. The most extraordinary of these has not been much dwelt on, being rather awkward to handle, but I think it is "within the resources of science"—or at least of literature—to effect the dealing with the minimum of offence. Throughout (in this respect following a rather

ugly trick of his earlier) Sterne, one may say, takes for granted that Mrs. Sterne and Mr. Draper will have the goodness to die in about three years, and that he and Eliza, united in matrimony of as holy a kind as circumstances may admit, will live together happily ever after at Coxwold, with hand-in-hand and tear-for-tear excursions in the garden, comfortable companionship in the house, etc. Yet he gives her in the most elaborate fashion details of the cause of his state of health—repeatedly asserted by the faculty, and, though at first resisted, finally acquiesced in by himself<sup>1</sup>—which would certainly deter anybody but an idiot at one end of the range of noncomposity or an erotic-madwoman at the other from marrying him.

This, however, is only one of the features of the *Journal* which make it seem like a sort of rubbish-heap or dustbin from one point of view—a safety-valve from another—when you take it with the *Journey*. This latter is artful to the point of being rather artificial; in the former, Sterne is careless of the slightest artistry. As he says himself, he “steals something every day from his sentimental journey to obey a more sentimental impulse in writing to” her: but if so, the stealing has certainly been good for the thing stolen from, and the stealings

<sup>1</sup> The strongest proof of this acquiescence is his subsequent information that, independently of the physician's orders, he is taking a certain *extrait de Saturne*. Now this was, as one happens to know from Restif de la Bretonne (himself a gutter-Sterne without humour), not much later a favourite nostrum in France for the state of matters in question. That he repeats the unsavoury story to Lord Shelburne (Malagrida) does not in the least weaken the force of the argument indicated above.



themselves are certainly "trash". Intentionally or unintentionally he has fetched passages from his early love-letters to Elizabeth in order to bestow them upon Eliza. The celebrated polyanthus of earlier days has been promoted from vegetable to animal life: and becomes a cat—which sits beside him and purrs to his sorrows. At another time a Molly (*vice* Fanny of five-and-twenty years earlier) sympathises as he "sauces" his "chicking" (compare Maggy in *Little Dorrit*) with tears. Indeed, the whole *Journal* is simply drenched in tears, which "sausage" not merely the "chicking" but in another place a more luxurious meal—"venison, fish or wild fowl or a couple of fowls [*sic*—with curds and strawberries and cream and a bottle of wine"—all of which "rural feast" his Bramine is to "govern" some day. At times he is planning elegant apartments for this—apartments which, one fears, must have been usurped by Mrs. Sterne and Lydia when they came. When they *have* come, he confides to Eliza that his wife has confided to him that she is ten years older than he thought her! He does not exactly draw the obvious consequences: but it is certainly difficult at this point not to let disgust get the upper hand in the odd mixture of feelings with which one usually regards Sterne. And at the same time the suspicion of slight "derangement" grows stronger. Elizabeth Lumley belonged to one of the best-known families in Yorkshire; York was evidently as good at gossip as a provincial capital and a cathedral city (which here means better than any other place in the world) can be: and there had been more than a quarter of a century in which this trifling difference (a whole decade)

might have been discovered by Sterne himself or others. Also, Eliza, though in some ways foolish, seems to have been by no means stupid: and could hardly miss the immense improbability of what he tells her. But down it goes: in almost the last words of the *Journal* except rhapsodies about "returns" and "joys for ever", brought nearer of course (though he does not here say so) by these comfortable ten years extra in his wife's age. I fear that this, if nothing else, decides the quarrel between Thackeray and the "*Superfine*" *Review* as to Sterne being a gentleman: though it is fair to remember that the *Review* could not have seen the passage and that Thackeray could have, and probably had—though he does not quote it. People don't trouble themselves much about gentlemanhood now, which may or may not be as well. But certainly under no tenable definition of it could this be passed: whether Mrs. Sterne actually made the confession or not. Perhaps it would be worse if she did.

There is no need to examine the "new money" (as the investment tipsters say in modern newspapers) further, except just to notice the astounding draft (for it was probably nothing more) of a letter to Draper, confessing himself in love with "your wife", though with the same sort of love as he feels for Lydia; and expressing desires to be of service to her in so vague a fashion as once more to suggest aberration. But I trust it will not show similar traits in my own case if I beg to repeat a sentence or two from my original remarks in the larger edition, with a few comments on them as they are affected by this later information. On one point—that, as was said then, "we could not, at any price that

could be easily formulated or paid, spare Sterne from English *literature*"—this sentence I think remains perfectly true, and indeed is quite unaffected by the novelties. If anybody wants detailed argument in support of it he can go to the old work. On the other hand it was suggested that Sterne "was not exactly a good *man*, though there have been many worse". The new information certainly underlines the first clause rather unfortunately: but I do not think that it invalidates the last. On the contrary, since the old judgment was accompanied by acknowledgment of Sterne's intensely "histrionic" quality, the new stuff explains, if it does not excuse, the uglier features of Yorick's behaviour. He was never sincere; and as we see from the *Journal*, his insincerity at last got the better of him, except when almost "between the stirrup and the ground" he wrote that marvellous and largely reconciling letter to Mrs. James which we have always known. It was an age of great actors: and I fancy—though perhaps because I am better able to judge it in his case than in the other—that Sterne was as great an actor in one way as his friend Garrick was in most others. Only, when you personate yourself too persistently there comes a reckoning. The new matter has shown something of what the penalties of that reckoning were.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The passage of "A Roundabout Journey—Notes of a Week's Holiday" in the *Cornhill*, where Thackeray refers to his receipt of the *Journal* from "a gentleman at Bath", was removed when the "Roundabout Papers" appeared as a book after his death: and I believe does not come into some reprints. It will, however, be found in the Appendix of the last volume of the "Oxford" edition, arranged by the present writer, and perhaps in others.

## TRISTRAM SHANDY

The *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* (which, as it has been excellently observed, is in reality based on the life of the gent.'s uncle and the opinions of the gent.'s father), is the largest and in every way the chief field for these diversions.<sup>1</sup> The apparatus, and, so far as there can be said to have been one, the object with which Sterne marked it out and filled it up, are clear, and even the former must have been clear enough to anybody of some reading and some intelligence long before the excellent Dr. Ferriar, in the spirit of a reverent iconoclast, set himself to work to point out Sterne's exact indebtedness to Rabelais, Burton, Béroalde (if Béroalde wrote the *Moyen de Parvenir*), Bruscambille, and the rest. Of this particular part of the matter I do not think it necessary to say much. The charge of plagiarism is usually an excessively idle one; for when a man of genius steals, he always makes the thefts his own; and when a man steals without genius, the thefts are mere fairy gold which turns to leaves and pebbles under his hand. No doubt Sterne "lifted" in *Tristram*, and still more in the *Sermons*, with rather more freedom and audacity than most men of genius; but when we remember that he took Burton's denunciation of the practice and reproduced it (all but in Burton's very words) as his own, it must be clear to anyone who is not very dull indeed that he was playing an audacious practical joke. Where he is best, he

<sup>1</sup> [See p. 149 *ante*.]

does not steal at all, and that is the only point of real importance.

It is somewhat more, I think, the business of the critic (who is here more especially bound not to look only at the stop-watch) to note the far more striking way in which Sterne borrowed, not actual passages and words, but manner and style. Here, perhaps, we shall find him accountant for a greater debt; and here also we may think that though his genius is indisputable, he gives more reason to those who should deny him the highest kind of genius. Beyond doubt not merely his reading, but his temper and his characteristics of all kinds, inclined him to the style to which the French fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gave the name of *fatrasie*, or pillar-to-post divagation, with more or less of a covert satiric aim. But if we compare the dealing of Swift with Cyrano de Bergerac, the dealing of Fielding with the romance and novel as it existed before his time, nay, the dealing of Shakespeare with the Marlowe drama, we shall note a marked difference in Sterne's procedure. Nobody, even in his own day, who knew Rabelais at all could fail to detect the almost servile following of manner in great things and in small which *Tristram* displays. No one—a much smaller designation—who knows the strange, unedifying, but very far from commonplace book of which, as I have hinted, I never can quite believe that Béroalde de Verville was the author, can fail to detect an even closer, though a somewhat less obvious and, so to speak, less verifiable following here.

In another region—the purgatory of all Sterne's

commentators—we can trace this corrupt following as distinctly at least, though it has, I think, been less often definitely attributed. Sterne's too celebrated indecency is, with one exception, *sui generis*. No doubt much nonsense has been and is talked about "indecency" in general literature. When it is indulged as it has been, for instance, in French of late, it becomes a nuisance of the most loathsome kind. It is always perhaps better left alone. But if it be a sin to laugh now and then frankly at what were once called "gentlemen's stories", then not merely many a gallant, noble, and not unwise gentleman, but I fear not a few ladies, both fair and fine, are damned, with Shakespeare and Scott and Southey, with Margaret of Navarre and Marie de Sévigné, to keep them in countenance. Yet to merit indulgence, this questionable quality, in addition to being treated as genius treats, must have certain sub-qualities, or freedoms from quality, of its own. It must not be brutal and inhuman, since the quality of humanity is the main thing that saves it. It must not be underhand and sniggering. It must be frank and jovial, or frank and passionate. Perhaps, in some cases, it may be saved, as Swift's is to a great extent, by the overmastering pessimism of despair, which enforces its contempt of man and man's fate by bringing forward these evidences of his weakness. But Sterne can plead none of these exemptions. He has neither the frank laughter of Aristophanes and Rabelais nor the frank passion of Catullus and Donne. He was incapable of feeling any *sæva indignatio* whatever. The attraction of the thing for him was, I fear, merely the attraction of the improper

because it is improper; because it shocks people, or makes them blush, or gives them an unholy little quiver of sordid shamefaced delectation. His famous apology of the child playing on the floor and showing in innocence what is not usually shown, was desperately unlucky. For his displays are those of educated and economic un-innocency. And he took this manner, I am nearly sure, wholly and directly from Voltaire, who enjoys the unenviable copyright and patent of it.

The third characteristic which Sterne took from others, which dyed his work deeply, and which injured more than it helped it, was his famous, his unrivalled, Sensibility or Sentimentalism. A great deal has been written about this admired eighteenth-century device, and there is no space here for discussing it. Suffice it to say, that although Sterne certainly did not invent it—it had been inculcated by two whole generations of French novelists before him, and had been familiar in England for half a century—he has the glory, such as it is, of carrying it to the farthest possible. The dead donkey and the live donkey, the latter (as I humbly but proudly join myself to Mr. Thackeray and Mr. Traill in thinking) far the finer animal; *Le Fever* and *La Fleur*; *Maria* and *Eliza*; *Uncle Toby's fly*, and poor Mrs. Sterne's antenuptial polyanthus; the stoics that Mr. Sterne (with a generous sense that he was in no danger of that lash) wished to be whipped, and the critics from whom he would have fled from Dan to Beersheba to be delivered;—all the celebrated persons and passages of his works, all the decorations and fireworks thereof, are directed mainly to the exhibition of “Sensibility”, once

so charming, now, alas! hooted and contemned of the people!

And now it will be possible to have done with his foibles, all the rest in Sterne being for praise, with hardly any mixture of blame. We have seen what he borrowed from others, mostly to his hurt; let us now see what he contributed of his own, almost wholly to his credit and advantage. He had, in the first place, what most writers when they begin almost invariably and almost inevitably lack, a long and carefully amassed store, not merely of reading, but of observation of mankind. Although his nearly fifty years of life had been in the ordinary sense uneventful, they had given him opportunities which he had amply taken. A "son of the regiment", he had evidently studied with the greatest and most loving care the ways of an army which still included a large proportion of Marlborough's veterans; and it has been constantly and reasonably held that his chief study had been his father, whom he evidently adored in a way. Roger Sterne is the admitted model of my Uncle Toby; and I at least have no doubt that he was the original of Mr. Shandy also, for some of the qualities which appear in his son's character of him are Walter's, not Toby's. It would have required, perhaps, even greater genius than Sterne possessed, and an environment less saturated with the delusive theory of the "ruling passion", to have given us the mixed and blended temperament instead of separating it into two gentlemen at once, and making Walter Shandy all wayward intellect and Tobias all gentle goodness. But if it had been done—as Shakespeare perhaps alone could



have done it—we should have had a greater and more human figure than either. Mr. Shandy would then never have come near, as he does sometimes, to being a bore; and my Uncle Toby (if I may say so without taking the wings of the morning to flee from the wrath of the extreme Tobyolaters) would have been saved from the occasional appearance of being something like a fool.

Still, these two are delightful even in their present dichotomy; and Sterne was amply provided by his genius, working on his experience, with company for them. His fancy portrait of himself as “Yorick” (his unfeigned Shakespearianism is one of his best traits) is a little vague and fantastic; and that of Eugenius, which is supposed to represent John Hall Stevenson, is almost as slight as it is flattering. But Dr. Slop, who is known to have been drawn (with somewhat unmerciful fidelity in externals, but not at all unkindly when we look deeper) from Dr. Burton, a well-known Jacobite practitioner who had suffered from the Hanoverian zeal of Yorick’s uncle Jaques in the ’45, is a masterpiece. The York dignitaries are veritable etchings in outline, more instinct with life and individuality than a thousand elaborately painted pictures; all the servants, Obadiah, Susannah, Bridget, and the rest, are the equals of Fielding’s or of Thackeray’s domestics; and though Tristram himself is the shadow of a shade, I confess that I seem to see a vivid portrait in the three or four strokes which alone give us “my dear, dear Jenny”. Mr. Fitzgerald, succumbing to a not unnatural temptation, considering the close juxtaposition in time, approxim-

ates this to the "dear, dear Kitty" of the letters to Miss Catherine de Fourmentelle. But this, taking all things together, would be a rather serious *scandalum damigellarum*; and I do not think it necessary to identify, though the traits seem to me to suit not ill with the few genuine ones in the letters about Mrs. Sterne herself. That the "dear, dear" should be ironical more or less is quite Shandean. All these, if not drawn directly from individuals (the lower exercise), are first generalised and then precipitated into individuality from a large observation (which is the infinitely higher and better). I fear I must except Widow Wadman, save in the sentry-box scene, from this encomium. But then Widow Wadman is not really a real person. She is partly an instrument to put my Uncle Toby through some new motions, and partly a cue to enable Sterne to indulge in his worst foible. As for Trim, *quis vituperavit* Trim? The lover of the "popish clergywoman" is simply perfect, with a not much less good heart and a much better head than his master's, and in his own degree hardly less of a gentleman.

The manner in which these delightful persons (I observe with shame that I had omitted the modest worth of Mrs. Shandy, nearly the most delightful of them all) are introduced to the reader, may have suffered a little from that corrupt following of which enough has been said. I can only say, that I would compound for a good deal more corruption of the same kind, allied with a good deal less genius. It can scarcely be doubted that there was a real pre-established harmony between Sterne's gifts and the *fatrasie* manner; certainly this

manner, if it sometimes exhibited his weaknesses, gave rare opportunities to his strength. And the same may be said of his style. He might certainly have given us less of the typographical tricks with which he chose to bedizen and bedaub it, and sometimes in his ultra-Rabelaisian moods—I do not mean of *gauloiserie* but of sheer fooling—we feel the falsetto rather disastrously. It is constantly forgotten by unfavourable critics of Rabelais that his extravagances were, to a great extent, at any rate, quite natural outbursts of animal spirits. The Middle Ages, though it has become the fashion with those who know nothing about them to represent them as ages of gloom, were probably the merriest time of this world's history; and the Reformation and the Renaissance, with their pedantry and their puritanism, and, worst of all, their physical science, had not quite killed the merriment when Rabelais wrote. But though animal spirits still survived in Sterne's day, it cannot be said that in England, any more than elsewhere, there was much genuine merriment of the honest, childish, medieval kind, and thus his manner perpetually jars. Still the style, independently of the tricks, was excellently suited for the work. It is a moot point how far the extremely loose and ungirt character of this style, which sometimes, and indeed often, reaches sheer slovenliness and solecism, was intentional. I think myself that it was nearly as deliberate as the asterisks and the black and marbled pages. We know from the *Sermons* that Sterne could write carefully enough when he chose, and we know from the MS. of the *Journey* that he corrected sedulously. Nor is it likely that he had the excuse of

hurry. The shortest time that he ever took over one of his two-volume batches was more than six months; and looking at the practice, not of miracles of industry and facility like Scott, but of rather dilatory writers like Thackeray, one would think that the quantity (which is not more than a couple of hundred pages of one of these present volumes) might be written in little more than six weeks. At any rate, the style, conversational, unpretentious, too easy to be jerky, and yet too broken to be sustained, suits subject and scheme as few others could.

But there is perhaps little need to say more about a book which, though some say that few read it through nowadays, is thoroughly well known in outline and in its salient passages, and which will pretty certainly lay hold of all fit readers as soon as they take to it. Of its writer a very little more may perhaps be said, all the more so because those who, not understanding critical admiration, think that biographers and editors ought not only to be just and a little kind, but extravagantly partial to their subjects, may conceive that I have been a little unjust, or, at any rate, a little unkind to Sterne. If so, they have not read his own extremely ingenious, and in general, if not in particular, very sound attack on the adage *de mortuis*. But if not *nil nisi*, there is yet very much *bonum* to be said of Sterne. He was not merely endowed with a singular and essential genius; he was not merely the representative and mouthpiece, in a way hardly surpassed by anyone, of a certain way of thought and feeling more or less peculiar to his

time. These were his merits, his very great merits, as a writer. But he had others, and great, if not very great ones, as a man. Though never rich, he seems to have been free from the fault of parsimony; and albeit he died in debt, not deeply tainted with that of extravagance in money matters. For most of his later expenditure was on others, and he might justly calculate on his pen paying, and more than paying, his shot. Little love as there was lost between him and his wife, he always took the greatest care to provide for her wants in the rather costly severance of their establishments, and never even in his most indiscreet moments hints a grumble at her expenditure, a vice of which some people of much higher general reputation have been known to be guilty. Though he was certainly pleased at the attentions of "the great", I do not know that there is any just cause for accusing him of truckling to or fawning on them beyond the custom and courtesy of the time. For all his reckless humour, there was no ill-nature in him. His worst enemies have admitted that his affection for his daughter was very pretty and quite unaffected; and his letters to and of Mrs. James show that he could think of a woman nobly and wholesomely as a friend, for all his ignoble and unwholesome ways of thought in regard to the sex. If it had not been for the cruel indiscretion of his Lydia (which, however, has something of the old virtue of conveying the balm as well as the sting), he would probably have been much better thought of than he is. And considering the delightful books here once more presented, I think we may consent to forgive the faults, which, after all, were mainly his own business,

for the merits by which we so largely benefit, and for which he reaped no over-bounteous guerdon.

1894 (*revised*)

## A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

Shandeism, like other creeds, has, as I have observed before, its Big-endians and its Little-endians, the point of difference between them in this instance being the respective merits of *Tristram* and the *Journey*. There are those who hold that the latter is in everything but bulk, and even in that, inasmuch as there is no risk of tedium here, an advance on its predecessor—in finer if less rollicking and kaleidoscopic humour, in delicacy and uniformity of sentiment, in composition—in fact, in almost all the requisites of art. The Big-endians reply that the *Sentimental Journey* is at best a piece of *Tristram Shandy* retouched and worked out in Meissonier-like detail; that its merits are all contained in those of the larger and earlier book; that much of what is good in that book does not here reappear; that such manliness as there was in *Tristram* has disappeared altogether; and that the further elaboration of “sensibility” is at best trifling, and at worst more tedious and more disgusting than the more exuberant and grosser exaggerations of “humour” in *Tristram*. It is perhaps not for me to assume a casting vote in this dispute. I like both books, but I incline to the Tristramites, if it is absolutely necessary to give the palm; for it is undoubtedly true that there is little in the *Journey* which is not in

*Tristram*, and much in *Tristram* which is not in the *Journey*.

Another point in dispute, but in dispute of a different kind, is, whether any more of the *Journey* was ever written or, at the stage at which Sterne finished what we have, was ever intended to be written. In certain documents which were published after Sterne's death, purporting to be communications from his valet, La Fleur, it is said that Sterne had written "a large trunkful of papers" by the end of his Italian tour. But the best judges attach very little credence to this statement; and even if it were true, it would not follow that the papers were intended to be worked up into more of the *Journey*. For nobody needs to be told that the title, "through France and Italy", would no more have imposed on Sterne a sense of obligation in filling it up, than if it had been "through France to the Moon". I believe that the industrious, though inconceivable, race of continuators have many times done after their kind to the book; but I do not think that I ever actually read a continuation of it.

Let us, therefore, take it as it is, and not as it is not. It is the actual "swan-song" of its writer, as few other books have been—his most characteristic, most coherent, and most finished piece of work; at once his most popular (for the suppression of the strongly English element of *Tristram* opened a wide door of entrance to foreigners, of which they eagerly availed themselves), his most easily read, and perhaps for that reason his most widely known. The book is short enough no doubt, but short as it is, I doubt whether there be

another book in English prose of the same size which is so thoroughly known to readers. Artists, no less than men of letters, fastened at once upon Sterne; and while Mackenzie and others in England, Diderot and others in France, and a whole school in Germany followed his style, the sharply isolated and easily bodied-forth scenes of the *Journey* were at once recommended to the pencil. Indeed, there is something irresistibly pictorial about the book itself; and it must never be forgotten that Sterne was an industrious practitioner with the brush, though he does not seem to have arrived at any great proficiency. The *Journey* is a series of written tableaux, each at once inviting and furnishing its own illustration, which is sometimes pointed out in the most obliging way by the very titles of the chapters. The portmanteau, the monk, the *désobligeant*, the *remise*, the lady, the monk again, and the snuff-box, in a series of sandwiched or dissolving views—this is but the beginning of a list which would easily carry me over this page and the next if I felt any difficulty in filling them otherwise, and which every reader, either in the past or as he reads anew, can fill up further as he goes along, till they end with the famous trio in the roadside inn near Madane.

This rapid succession of images, presented as they are with Sterne's peculiar power, is, at any rate for so short a book, as certain to arrest the reader's attention as the most exciting and artfully constructed story. But the author was not satisfied with this single appeal. It is true that he has here given none of the individual human interest of which *Tristram Shandy* is so full.



The central figure, so brilliantly described by Sam Weller as "the gentleman in the black silk smalls as knowed the young 'ooman as kept a goat", does not appeal to us at all in the same way as Walter or Tobias Shandy, as the Corporal, or even as the Widow. He is no creation; he is only a chorus commenting on himself. As for "the young 'ooman" herself, English nineteenth-century humanity has been falling more and more away from her, till at the present moment it requires a positive operation of deliberate literary effort to feel any interest in her at all. The same remark is not much less true of the monk. The lady of the *remise* is a little different: she is at least flesh and blood of all time, not a mere cloud for the Ixions of a very little day to wreak their mock-passions on; and La Fleur, who was a real man, retains some of his reality. With these rank the *grisette* and the *fille-de-chambre*, and the two actresses in the above-mentioned trio-finale. But they are still types rather than persons, which no doubt is French enough, and a reason why the French like them. The prisoner is not much better than the dead donkey—the starling is a much superior creature to either—and the episode of the notary looks like a return (it is true it is the only one) to the pure *coq-à-l'âne* divagations of *Tristram*. Still, all these scenes and characters—good, indifferent, and, as it now seems to us, almost bad—have something of a phantasmagoric character as they pass before the sighing, smiling, sneering figure in the black silk smalls, who seems at once to act as showman to us and as soliloquising reminiscent to himself. They never have the full-flowing life of their forerunners, but they move

with a sort of ghostly unity, a similarity of mood and decoration, in which those forerunners are usually lacking.

It may be added, that the *Sentimental Journey* is very far indeed from being without touches of nature, though Sterne has chosen to give them in this odd second-hand way. Nowhere is he shrewder in this respect; nowhere are his criticisms of mankind, whether in general or as Frenchmen or Englishmen, more acute. It must be added, that there is no improvement, if there is not even a further fall, in respect of his most notorious and most offensive failing. The *Sentimental Journey* has indeed nothing in it quite so "gross" as many passages of *Tristram*; but the air of double-meaning is almost more universal; and indeed the practice had evidently by this time become what the French call a *tic* with the author. In *Tristram* the innuendoes of this kind are always pretty obvious, unless they are sly allusions to some older writer, which may escape those who have read him not, though they will strike those who have read him full in the face. In the *Sentimental Journey* the hints are so quintessenced and alembicated, that sometimes the reader wonders whether he has got them on the brain himself, and is, as the Swedes say, "seeing ghosts by daylight". But there is very little fear, or rather hope, of this in Sterne's case; and it may be taken as much more likely that a passage which seems innocent has a snigger in it somewhere, than that one capable of being twisted was not intended to undergo the twist.

There is small need, however, to dwell on "the worst parts of *Tristram*"—words which Shandean will recog-

nise and take in good part. In this, his most generally acceptable, if not exactly most famous book, the essence of him is at least fully recognisable. And I do not know whether it be a faulty style of criticism—at any rate, it is a style to which I find myself more and more attached the longer that I practise the critical profession—but it seems to me much more to the point to hold to the best things in a man, than to explore the worst. In Sterne's case especially, there are so many excuses and alleviations! He had passed those years—the earlier years of manhood—which far more than the years of youth determine and harden the *plies* of the soul, in a second-class, though not a wholly undistinguished society, without practice, without criticism. The space of time in which it was given him to produce work for the public eye was not very long, was huddled (as his own day would have said) with infinite distractions, and was not abundantly provided with those opportunities of clearing the judgment by aid of unfavourable and, perhaps, even unfair comment which most men of letters enjoy, or at least undergo. I am of course aware that Sterne met with unfavourable criticism enough—in some cases from men as distinguished as Goldsmith and Smollett. But these criticisms, which in his time had little weight as coming from periodical writers, were overborne by fashionable applause. Nor was he long enough exposed to them to derive much benefit in any case. Moreover, Goldsmith, at the time that he criticised Sterne, was an unknown bookseller's hack; Smollett's unvarying savagery and partisanship diminished the value, though they may not have softened the sting, of

his criticism; and it is fair to say that neither had any really considerable critical powers, great men as both were in other respects. I do not think that much longer practice would have done Sterne much good. The gods are just always, and perhaps they are not very often chargeable even with unkindness. In different circumstances, it is quite possible—it is almost certain—that he would not have written at all. Very few people would have heard of him; he would have died a tolerably easy-going prebendary and vicar, with no extraordinarily good reputation among those who knew him, and with nothing to give him any reputation at all among those who did not know. As it was, his fate was different. There was found for him the work that his hand was fitted to do, and he did it; did it so thoroughly, that I can hardly conceive his having improved the doing, whatever span had been granted him. Rather would he—for his reading was not very wide, and his genius, though intensely individual, was rather narrow—have continued to do worse, and worse, and worse what he had once done, with all his shortcomings, well, and almost supremely well. For we could not, at any price that could be easily formulated or paid, spare Sterne from English literature. He was not wanted to found a school; and his scholars, so far as he has had any, have not been very happy. His humour, even at its very best, lacks distinction and greatness. His pathos, even at its very best, is far below the highest. His sensibility, as distinguished from his pathos, is precious, like *Henri-Deux* ware (which they have left off calling *Henri-Deux*), because of its rarity and its peculiarity, not of its

beauty. His learning is not deep; his wit, apart from tricks, not perfect; his deliberate indecency, incomparably unattractive.

But in his combination of these things he stood alone, and supplies a product of the British genius which, without him, would have been wanting. If Sterne had been a Frenchman, he would have been a kind of second-class Voltaire, a person to be gladly done without when we had the first-class one. If he had been an ordinary Englishman, with the ordinary Englishman's sense of restraint and propriety, or even an extraordinary Englishman, with the extraordinary Englishman's contempt for meaner things, he would only have been an inferior Shakespeare or an inferior Swift, or a Fielding with less experience and a thinner genius. But as it was, he showed us what the English race can do when it discards its prudery, is not actuated by any great passions, and approximates nearer to the Continental type than in almost any other author of whom we have intelligence, except Horace Walpole and Francis Jeffrey. The result may not be such as to encourage us to welcome those well-intentioned young persons who think to become distinguished men of letters by disregarding *le cant britannique*. But it is such as to make us thank Apollo and the Muses that we had Laurence Sterne.

For his work stands by itself; it is delightful in its weaknesses as in its strength. The illegitimate way of reckoning such things goes on the principle of asking, "Would you give for Sterne's work a play of Shakespeare, a book of the *Faerie Queene*, a novel of Fielding's

or of Thackeray's?" This is wrong and illogical. The just criterion is, "Would you, for an additional play of Shakespeare, book of the *Faerie Queene*, novel of Thackeray or of Fielding, consent not to know Sterne?" And I at least answer without the slightest hesitation that I would not. It is possible that he is not supreme; but he is not replaceable; and what you cannot replace, you cannot dispense with.

If any test of this other than the conscience of all capable students of literature be wanted, it will be found in that famous "Roundabout" paper which Thackeray devoted to Dessein's. Thackeray was one of the greatest English men of letters in prose. He was an admirable parodist; and though he had causes, legitimate and illegitimate, for not liking Sterne, he had far too many wits not to know that to belittle your man effectually when you parody him, you must be *like*. But the speeches which, in the ghostly dialogue, Thackeray puts in Sterne's mouth are not in the least like. They are not Sterne at all. Nobody, easy as it looks, has ever written complete Sternese but Sterne. They can pile on the sensibility like Mackenzie, and they can, like the author of the fragment printed with the, as I think, spurious Letters, exaggerate the "sculduddery". They can put stars, and dashes, and points, and everything of that kind; but they cannot write Sterne.

And when it comes to this, that a man, imitating much, is himself inimitable, what further passport (a most germane word) does he want to the land of matters unforget — what further protection from the *droit d'aubaine* of any power?

THE LETTERS, SERMONS, AND  
MISCELLANIES

It did not appear to be necessary, in the present edition of Sterne's novels, to include, or endeavour to include—for some of them are still copyright, and some unprinted—the whole of his miscellaneous works. The majority of the sermons are of extremely little interest. Of all the earlier ones, that given in *Tristram Shandy* itself is a fully sufficient example; and of the more deliberately Shandean discourses, printed in 1766 and later, those which have been selected here will, I think, satisfy the curiosity of most people. For the method, though obvious enough, and not particularly edifying, is also not extremely amusing in large doses.

The autobiographic fragment claimed a place of indisputable right; and the *History of a Good Warm Watch-Coat*, though not very much older than *Tristram Shandy* itself, is older; and in other points besides the selection of the name "Trim" is most interesting as a forerunner. Its usual companion in the last-century editions, the Rabelaisian scrap about Homenas, did not appear to me to possess sufficient interest to reappear. Respecting the letters themselves, I deliberated and pondered almost as much as Sir Thomas Bertram himself (or Mr. and Mrs. Sterne, when they talked over their friends, Mr. Blake and Miss Ash) could have thought proper, before finally determining what to do with them. I decided at last to give all those included in

the standard ten-volume edition of the *Works*, except the last four, which are, in that edition, admitted to be of dubious genuineness. I may add, that the first three of these, while they are utterly uninteresting, appear to me to be almost certain *pastiches* by an imitator, and not a very clever imitator, of Sterne's style. The "Impromptu" which, though not a letter at all, figures last in the *Letters* as usually printed, is a *coq-à-l'âne* which Sterne might have written when he was, as its unknown godfather says, "soused", though we do not know that to be in this condition was a frequent vice of his. The conclusion, however, in which, on the evident pattern of the conclusions of the two novels, a coarse line of Rochester's is dragged in to achieve a double meaning, is extremely suspicious. In these moods of his, Sterne usually went to originals less generally known than Rochester.

The exclusion of these apocrypha has the additional advantage, that the collection now concludes, as it should, with the famous deathbed letter, of which even Thackeray acknowledged the force and pathos; while it enables me to say that nothing not certainly Sterne's is included here except those letters to him which complete his correspondence. Nor have I thought it necessary to exclude the "very sad dog-Latin" epistle, which, by the way, I am as nearly certain as if I had seen it written, is years older than the date usually assigned to it. Mr. Traill (who does not pronounce on the date of the letter) is of course absolutely correct in pointing out that Mr. Fitzgerald has mistaken the application of the *quadraginta annos et plus*, of the com-



pleted *octavum lustrum*, in giving it to Sterne instead of Stevenson. But in 1767, the usually given date, Stevenson was close upon fifty (he was born in 1718), and the words would have been totally inapplicable to him. On the other hand, taking them literally would put the letter about 1758 or 1759, when the great fermentation which produced *Tristram* and changed Sterne's whole life took place, when the Fourmentelle flame was just a-kindling, and when other things (which would be absurd in 1767) suit well enough. Couched as it is in the blessed obscurity of a learned language, it cannot be intelligible except to those who are already initiated in that *Romana simplicitas* of speech to which we give a grosser name than simplicity, and of which they have "seen many others" in Latin literature itself.

The only other known documents attributed to Sterne, and not certainly falsehoods or forgeries, are the curious fragment which my friend M. Stapfer published, but which nothing but tradition attributes to our author, and which I do not myself believe to be his, and the various letters which have been published at different times, or which are still in MS.

A complete collection of all Sterne's letters, published and unpublished, would be by no means uninteresting; but it would be quite alien from the plan of this edition, inasmuch as it would require not only the good-will of the owners of copyrights or of originals, but also an elaborate *apparatus criticus* in the arrangement and annotation of the correspondence. I had, however, for a time debated with myself whether it might be desirable to add a few from different sources;

but I finally decided that to travel out of the limits of the standard edition, without giving a complete new one, would be inconvenient in many ways, not to mention that the intrinsic interest of the letters printed in this century is by no means great. One from Sterne to Warburton, printed some thirty years ago, and forming part of the correspondence already published, and reprinted here, is chiefly noticeable because of the half apologetic, half defiant tone of it ("I will, however, do my best; but laugh, my lord, I will, and as loud as I can too"), and for the audacious assertion, either equivocal or unintelligible, that the writer had "for nineteen years totally interrupted all correspondence with" Hall Stevenson, and had forgotten his hand.

The extra letters to this same Hall Stevenson, of which there are one or two, are no gain in any way. There remain the Fourmentelle and Blake correspondences, the former published many years ago by Mr. John Murray for the Philobiblon Society, the latter printed for the first time by Mr. Fitzgerald, who also gave some to the Archbishop of York, and refers to others. Messrs. Murray have already allowed the first to be more than once reprinted; and I do not doubt that Mr. Fitzgerald, whose literary courtesy is well known, would have allowed me to reprint the second. But neither seemed to me to be necessary. The Fourmentelle correspondence is no doubt genuine, though the story furnished with it to Mr. Murray by Mrs. Weston, the lady who sold him the letters and represented herself as a friend of Miss Fourmentelle's, is a tissue of wild inaccuracies, to use no stronger word. It

seems, however, that Catherine Béranger de Fourmentelle was a real person, who lived at York with her mother just at the time of the appearance of *Tristram*, came to London while Sterne was himself living there to receive the fruits of his labours, and was addressed by him, both at York and in town, in a series of letters of extreme warmth, several interviews also passing between them. Although "warm", however, and doubtless not "proper" from a married man to an unmarried girl, these letters contain nothing of Sterne's usual double meaning, and none of the nauseous sentimentalism of the "Eliza" series. The sentence in them which has caused much hubbub, "God will open a door when we shall sometime be much more together, and enjoy our desires without fear of interruption", and which has been construed into a prophecy of, or aspiration for, Mrs. Sterne's death, need not necessarily bear any such meaning. For the rest, the letters are ordinary love-letters enough; and the biographical details, though they sometimes confirm other sources of information, tell us little new. Nor can I see anything so very curious in the letter written by Sterne, but apparently intended for his "dear, dear Kitty" to copy, and recommending *Tristram Shandy* to some third person. Sterne was not a man of quixotic delicacy, and the supposed writer of the letter is made quite honestly to admit that the author is a great friend of hers, and that she is trying to do him a service. As for the Blake series, it is addressed to one of Sterne's colleagues in the Chapter at York, who apparently had a difficult course of true love with a Miss Ash, and for whom Sterne and Mrs.

Sterne did friendly offices. They exhibit the writer in a pleasant, amiable, unaffected mood; they give some gossiping particulars, and they show that Mr. and Mrs. Sterne could play up to each other in ordinary social life quite properly. But they cannot be said to be of great importance, or even of much interest.

Thus the probable reader will have in these two volumes all Sterne's work, outside the two novels which he has already had, that is really worth his attention. The Sterne shown here, whether in sermon, in fragment, or in epistle, will be little different from the Sterne in the two novels, for we have had few men of letters who were more of a piece than this singular parson. On the letters, it is hardly necessary to add anything to what has been said here and in the general introduction. Something must, but perhaps not much need be said, in the way of purely literary criticism of the contents of this volume. The matter of the *Letters* is avowedly more interesting than the manner. In the *Sermons*, the case is reversed. It has been supposed that in the less questionable characteristics of his epistolary style to women Sterne was imitating Swift, but I do not think this a necessary supposition. There is a certain manner which is common to almost all men of letters and brains when they address the other sex, a manner which, with individual alterations, is observable in the most different cases—in Swift and Scott, in Sterne and Sydney Smith. It is not exactly a case of

ὁ θῆρ δ' ἔβαινε δειλῶς,  
φοβέϊτο γὰρ Κυθήρην,

as the poet has it. But "the beast" endeavours to

subdue his worldly wit, and make it pleasant by jesting, to pay his court gallantly, and at the same time not servilely. Sterne is not the best example of this *commerce badinant*, as the Frenchman of his own time would have called it, but he is not the worst. In his general letters effect is evidently not aimed at, and it may be noted that in them his spelling is queer beyond the wont of men of his day.

The *Sermons*, on the other hand, especially the first instalment (which extends to Sermon XIV), are the most carefully written things of his that we have in form, and show that slipshod writing was by no means necessary to him. Until he came deliberately to wear his cap and bells in the pulpit—the famous “That I deny”, in the second Sermon, is a doubtful exception—there is not so very much difference, though undoubtedly there is some, between him and the usual divines of his own day and the day before, since Tillotson, a century earlier, had set the fashion of elegant and unscholastic writing. Nor do I think it in the very least necessary to suppose any conscious hypocrisy in Sterne even after he began, as in the later examples given here, to try experiments, to see how far Tristram in bands and gown could borrow the merits of Tristram in coat and *solitaire*. He could never here, any more than elsewhere, have arrived at the heights and depths of thought, religious or other; and a curious example of it is the exceedingly commonplace turn which, after a not unpromising beginning, he gives to so great a text as that about Time and Chance. But though he could no more have preached Catholic

doctrine than he could have felt Evangelical fervour, he maintains both a fair standard of orthodoxy and a fair standard of morality even at his raciest; while, as already stated, he paid the pulpit the compliment of attending far more carefully to the minutiae of composition than he ever did out of that rostrum.

His critics have not, I think, always kept in sight quite clearly enough the fact that in the known, or presumed, contents of the library of "Crazy Castle" Sterne must have found examples of this as well as of the other style of composition to which he addicted himself. He had found the lay *fatrasie* of the French fifteenth and sixteenth centuries popular, and he seems to have thought that the clerical *fatrasie* might likewise "draw". He could not indeed follow Maillard, Menot, Raulin, and their fellows quite as easily as he had followed Rabelais and Béroalde; but he did his best. And in this particular respect I please myself with thinking that he did much better than he would have done in our day, though in our day perhaps he would have found his vein even more profitable and popular. We hold our fans up at the eighteenth century for its want of propriety, but at least it did not often favour a greatly excessive sentimentality in the pulpit, which we can hardly say of ourselves. It left Sterne a prebendary; and it hanged Dodd. At the present day, Sterne no doubt would have had to make fewer jokes. But by burdening his energies with some slight deflection towards the glorification of the working man, by crying up the "living wage" (how beautifully he would have done it), and by making the simple exchange (*si peu*

*que rien*) of "purity" for "impurity" as a favourite subject, I think he would have had not the slightest difficulty in arriving at canonries and archdeaconries, nor much in achieving deaneries or even bishoprics. I like him better as a mere prebendary, and as a little more than a mere novelist.

And in these capacities we may like him very much. He was not exactly a good man, though there have been many worse; and he was not exactly a great man, though there have been very few who so narrowly missed greatness. But he was, which many good and some great men have not been, a "rare man"—a man of altogether peculiar idiosyncrasy and distinction. He has been accused of histrionics; and it is true that there are very few, if any, writers of his merit who so constantly suggest the mask and the sock, the part and the cue. But if he was an actor rather than a creator, then we can give him the quality of greatness freely, for so great an actor is nowhere to be found in literature.

## MISS AUSTEN

### PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

WALT WHITMAN has somewhere a fine and just distinction between "loving by allowance" and "loving with personal love". This distinction applies to books as well as to men and women; and in the case of the not very numerous authors who are the objects of the personal affection, it brings a curious consequence with it. There is much more difference as to their best work than in the case of those others who are loved "by allowance", by convention, and because it is felt to be the right and proper thing to love them. And in the sect—fairly large and yet unusually choice—of Austenians or Janites, there would probably be found partisans of the claim to primacy of almost every one of the novels. To some the delightful freshness and humour of *Northanger Abbey*, its completeness, finish, and *entrain*, obscure the undoubted critical facts that its scale is small, and its scheme, after all, that of burlesque or parody, a kind in which the first rank is reached with difficulty. *Persuasion*, relatively faint in tone, and not enthralling in interest, has devotees who exalt above all the others its exquisite delicacy and keeping. The catastrophe of *Mansfield Park* is admittedly theatrical, the hero and heroine are insipid, and the author has almost wickedly destroyed all romantic interest by expressly



admitting that Edmund only took Fanny because Mary shocked him, and that Fanny might very likely have taken Crawford if he had been a little more assiduous; yet the matchless rehearsal-scenes and the characters of Mrs. Norris and others have secured, I believe, a considerable party for it. *Sense and Sensibility* has perhaps the fewest out-and-out admirers; but it does not want them.

I suppose, however, that the majority of at least competent votes would, all things considered, be divided between *Emma* and the present book; and perhaps the vulgar verdict (if indeed a fondness for Miss Austen be not of itself a patent of exemption from any possible charge of vulgarity) would go for *Emma*. It is the larger, the more varied, the more popular; the author had by the time of its composition seen rather more of the world, and had improved her general though not her most peculiar and characteristic dialogue; such figures as Miss Bates, as the Eltons, cannot but unite the suffrages of everybody. On the other hand, I, for my part, declare for *Pride and Prejudice* unhesitatingly. It seems to me the most perfect, the most characteristic, the most eminently quintessential of its author's works; and for this contention, in such narrow space as is permitted to me, I propose here to show cause.

In the first place, the book (it may be barely necessary to remind the reader) was in its first shape written very early, somewhere about 1796, when Miss Austen was barely twenty-one; though it was revised and finished at Chawton some fifteen years later, and was not published till 1813, only four years before her

death. I do not know whether, in this combination of the fresh and vigorous projection of youth and the critical revision of middle life, there may be traced the distinct superiority in point of construction which, as it seems to me, it possesses over all the others. The plot, though not elaborate, is almost regular enough for Fielding; hardly a character, hardly an incident, could be retrenched without loss to the story. The elopement of Lydia and Wickham is not, like that of Crawford and Mrs. Rushworth, a *coup de théâtre*; it connects itself in the strictest way with the course of the story earlier, and brings about the *dénouement* with complete propriety. All the minor passages—the loves of Jane and Bingley, the advent of Mr. Collins, the visit to Hunsford, the Derbyshire tour—fit in after the same unostentatious but masterly fashion. There is no attempt at the hide-and-seek, in-and-out business, which in the transactions between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax contributes no doubt a good deal to the intrigue of *Emma*, but contributes it in a fashion which I do not think the best feature of that otherwise admirable book. Although Miss Austen always liked something of the misunderstanding kind, which afforded her opportunities for the display of the peculiar and incomparable talent to be noticed presently, she has been satisfied here with the perfectly natural occasions provided by the false account of Darcy's conduct given by Wickham, and by the awkwardness (arising with equal naturalness) from the gradual transformation of Elizabeth's own feelings from positive aversion to actual love. I do not know whether the all-grasping hand of the playwright

has ever been laid upon *Pride and Prejudice*; and I dare say that, if it were, the situations would prove not startling or garish enough for the footlights, the character scheme too subtle and delicate for pit and gallery. But if the attempt were made, it would certainly not be hampered by any of those loosenesses of construction which, sometimes disguised by the conveniences of which the novelist can avail himself, appear at once on the stage.

I think, however, though the thought will doubtless seem heretical to more than one school of critics, that construction is not the highest merit, the choicest gift, of the novelist. It sets off his other gifts and graces most advantageously to the critical eye; and the want of it will sometimes mar those graces—appreciably, though not quite consciously—to eyes by no means ultra-critical. But a very badly built novel which excelled in pathetic or humorous character, or which displayed consummate command of dialogue—perhaps the rarest of all faculties—would be an infinitely better thing than a faultless plot acted and told by puppets with pebbles in their mouths. And despite the ability which Miss Austen has shown in working out the story, I for one should put *Pride and Prejudice* far lower if it did not contain what seem to me the very masterpieces of Miss Austen's humour and of her faculty of character-creation—masterpieces who may indeed admit John Thorpe, the Eltons, Mrs. Norris, and one or two others to their company, but who, in one instance certainly, and perhaps in others, are still superior to them.

The characteristics of Miss Austen's humour are so subtle and delicate that they are, perhaps, at all times easier to apprehend than to express, and at any particular time likely to be differently apprehended by different persons. To me this humour seems to possess a greater affinity, on the whole, to that of Addison than to any other of the numerous species of this great British genus. The differences of scheme, of time, of subject, of literary convention, are, of course, obvious enough; the difference of sex does not, perhaps, count for much, for there was a distinctly feminine element in "Mr. Spectator", and in Jane Austen's genius there was, though nothing mannish, much that was masculine. But the likeness of quality consists in a great number of common subdivisions of quality—demureness, extreme minuteness of touch, avoidance of loud tones and glaring effects. Also there is in both a certain not inhuman or unamiable cruelty. It is the custom with those who judge grossly to contrast the good nature of Addison with the savagery of Swift, the mildness of Miss Austen with the boisterousness of Fielding and Smollett, even with the ferocious practical jokes that her immediate predecessor, Miss Burney, allowed without very much protest. Yet both in Mr. Addison and in Miss Austen there is, though a restrained and well-mannered, an insatiable and ruthless delight in roasting and cutting up a fool. A man in the early eighteenth century, of course, could push this taste further than a lady in the early nineteenth; and no doubt Miss Austen's principles, as well as her heart, would have shrunk from such things as the letter from the unfor-

fortunate husband in the *Spectator*, who describes, with all the gusto and all the innocence in the world, how his wife and his friend induce him to play at blind-man's-buff. But another *Spectator* letter—that of the damsel of fourteen who wishes to marry Mr. Shapely, and assures her selected Mentor that “he admires your *Spectators* mightily”—might have been written by a rather more ladylike and intelligent Lydia Bennet in the days of Lydia's great-grandmother; while, on the other hand, some (I think unreasonably) have found “cynicism” in touches of Miss Austen's own, such as her satire of Mrs. Musgrove's self-deceiving regrets over her son. But this word “cynical” is one of the most misused in the English language, especially when, by a glaring and gratuitous falsification of its original sense, it is applied, not to rough and snarling invective, but to gentle and oblique satire. If cynicism means the perception of “the other side”, the sense of “the accepted hells beneath”, the consciousness that motives are nearly always mixed, and that to seem is not identical with to be—if this be cynicism, then every man and woman who is not a fool, who does not care to live in a fool's paradise, who has knowledge of nature and the world and life, is a cynic. And in that sense Miss Austen certainly was one. She may even have been one in the further sense that, like her own Mr. Bennet, she took an epicurean delight in dissecting, in displaying, in setting at work her fools and her mean persons. I think she did take this delight, and I do not think at all the worse of her for it as a woman, while she was immensely the better for it as an artist.

In respect of her art generally, Mr. Goldwin Smith has truly observed that "metaphor has been exhausted in depicting the perfection of it, combined with the narrowness of her field"; and he has justly added that we need not go beyond her own comparison to the art of a miniature painter. To make this latter observation quite exact we must not use the term miniature in its restricted sense, and must think rather of Memling at one end of the history of painting and Meissonier at the other, than of Cosway or any of his kind. And I am not so certain that I should myself use the word "narrow" in connection with her. If her world is a microcosm, the cosmic quality of it is at least as eminent as the littleness. She does not touch what she did not feel herself called to paint; I am not so sure that she could not have painted what she did not feel herself called to touch. It is at least remarkable that in two very short periods of writing—one of about three years, and another of not much more than five—she executed six capital works, and has not left a single failure. It is possible that the romantic paste in her composition was defective; we must always remember that hardly anybody born in her decade—that of the eighteenth-century seventies—independently exhibited the full romantic quality. Even Scott required hill and mountain and ballad, even Coleridge metaphysics and German, to enable them to chip the classical shell. Miss Austen was an English girl, brought up in a country retirement, at the time when ladies went back into the house if there was a white frost which might pierce their kid shoes, when a sudden cold was the subject of the

gravest fears, when their studies, their ways, their conduct were subject to all those fantastic limits and restrictions against which Mary Wollstonecraft protested with better general sense than particular taste or judgment. Miss Austen, too, drew back when the white frost touched her shoes; but I think she would have made a pretty good journey even in a black one.

For if her knowledge was not very extended, she knew two things which only genius knows. The one was humanity, and the other was art. On the first head she could not make a mistake; her men, though limited, are true, and her women are, in the old sense, "absolute". As to art, if she has never tried idealism, her realism is real to a degree which makes the false realism of our own day look merely dead-alive. Take almost any Frenchman, except the late M. de Maupassant, and watch him laboriously piling up strokes in the hope of giving a complete impression. You get none; you are lucky if, discarding two-thirds of what he gives, you can shape a real impression out of the rest. But with Miss Austen the myriad, trivial, unforced strokes build up the picture like magic. Nothing is false: nothing is superfluous. When (to take the present book only) Mr. Collins changed his mind from Jane to Elizabeth "while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire" (and we know *how* Mrs. Bennet would have stirred the fire), when Mr. Darcy "brought his coffee-cup back *himself*", the touch in each case is like that of Swift—"taller by the breadth of my nail"—which impressed the half-reluctant Thackeray with just and outspoken admiration. Indeed, fantastic as it may seem, I should put Miss Austen as

near to Swift in some ways as I have put her to Addison in others.

This Swiftian quality appears in the present novel as it appears nowhere else, in the character of the immortal, the ineffable Mr. Collins. Mr. Collins is really *great*; far greater than anything Addison ever did, almost great enough for Fielding or for Swift himself. It has been said that no one ever was like him. But in the first place, *he* was like him; he is there—alive, imperishable, more real than hundreds of prime ministers and archbishops, of “metals, semi-metals, and distinguished philosophers”. In the second place, it is rash, I think, to conclude that an actual Mr. Collins was impossible or non-existent at the end of the eighteenth century. It is very interesting that we possess, in this same gallery, what may be called a spoiled first draught, or an unsuccessful study of him, in John Dashwood. The formality, the under-breeding, the meanness, are there; but the portrait is only half alive, and is felt to be even a little unnatural. Mr. Collins is perfectly natural, and perfectly alive. In fact, for all the “miniature”, there is something gigantic in the way in which a certain side, and more than one, of humanity, and especially eighteenth-century humanity, its Philistinism, its well-meaning but hide-bound morality, its formal pettiness, its grovelling respect for rank, its materialism, its selfishness, receives exhibition. I will not admit that one speech or one action of this inestimable man is incapable of being reconciled with reality, and I should not wonder if many of these words and actions are historically true.



But the greatness of Mr. Collins could not have been so satisfactorily exhibited if his creatress had not adjusted so artfully to him the figures of Mr. Bennet and of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. The latter, like Mr. Collins himself, has been charged with exaggeration. There is, perhaps, a very faint shade of colour for the charge; but it seems to me very faint indeed. Even now I do not think that it would be impossible to find persons, especially female persons, not necessarily of noble birth, as overbearing, as self-centred, as neglectful of good manners, as Lady Catherine. A hundred years ago, an earl's daughter, the Lady Powerful (if not exactly Bountiful) of an out-of-the-way country parish, rich, long out of marital authority, and so forth, had opportunities of developing these agreeable characteristics which seldom present themselves now. As for Mr. Bennet, Miss Austen and Mr. Darcy and even Miss Elizabeth herself were, I am inclined to think, rather hard on him for the "impropriety" of his conduct. His wife was evidently, and must always have been, a quite irreclaimable fool; and unless he had shot her or himself there was no way out of it for a man of sense and spirit but the ironic. From no other point of view is he open to any reproach, except for an excusable and not unnatural helplessness at the crisis of the elopement; and his utterances are the most acutely delightful in the consciously humorous kind—in the kind that we laugh with, not at—that even Miss Austen has put into the mouth of any of her characters. It is difficult to know whether he is most agreeable when talking to his wife or when putting Mr. Collins through his paces; but the

general sense of the world has probably been right in preferring to the first rank his consolation to the former when she maunders over the entail, "My dear, do not give way to such gloomy thoughts. Let us hope for better things. Let us flatter ourselves that *I* may be the survivor"; and his inquiry to his colossal cousin as to the compliments which Mr. Collins has just related as made by himself to Lady Catherine, "May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are the result of previous study?" These are the things which give Miss Austen's readers the pleasant shocks, the delightful thrills, which are felt by the readers of Swift, of Fielding, and we may here add, of Thackeray, as they are felt by the readers of no other English author of fiction outside of these four.

The goodness of the minor characters in *Pride and Prejudice* has been already alluded to, and it makes a detailed dwelling on their beauties difficult in any space, and impossible in this. Mrs. Bennet we have glanced at, and it is not easy to say whether she is more exquisitely amusing or more horribly true. Much the same may be said of Kitty and Lydia; but it is not every author, even of genius, who would have differentiated with such unerring skill the effects of folly and vulgarity of intellect and disposition working upon the common weaknesses of woman at such different ages. With Mary, Miss Austen has taken rather less pains, though she has been even more unkind to her; not merely in the text, but, as we learn from those interesting traditional appendices which Mr. Austen Leigh has given us, in dooming her

privately to marry "one of Mr. Philips's clerks". The habits of first copying and then retailing moral sentiments, of playing and singing too long in public, are, no doubt, grievous and criminal; but perhaps poor Mary was rather the scapegoat of the sins of blue-stockings in that Fordyce-belectured generation. It is at any rate difficult not to extend to her a share of the respect and affection (affection and respect of a peculiar kind, doubtless) with which one regards Mr. Collins, when she draws the moral of Lydia's fall. I sometimes wish that the exigencies of the story had permitted Miss Austen to unite these personages, and thus at once achieve a notable mating and soothe poor Mrs. Bennet's anguish over the entail.

The Bingleys and the Gardiners and the Lucases, Miss Darcy and Miss de Bourgh, Jane, Wickham, and the rest, must pass without special comment, further than the remark that Charlotte Lucas (her egregious papa, though delightful, is just a little on the thither side of the line between comedy and farce) is a wonderfully clever study in drab of one kind, and that Wickham (though something of Miss Austen's hesitation of touch in dealing with young men appears) is a not much less notable sketch in drab of another. Only genius could have made Charlotte what she is, yet not disagreeable; Wickham what he is, without investing him either with a cheap Don Juanish attractiveness or a disgusting rascality. But the hero and the heroine are not thus to be dismissed.

Darcy has always seemed to me by far the best and most interesting of Miss Austen's heroes; the only

possible competitor being Henry Tilney, whose part is so slight and simple that it hardly enters into comparison. It has sometimes, I believe, been urged that his pride is unnatural at first in its expression and later in its yielding, while his falling in love at all is not extremely probable. Here again I cannot go with the objectors. Darcy's own account of the way in which his pride had been pampered is perfectly rational and sufficient; and nothing could be, psychologically speaking, a *causa verior* for its sudden restoration to healthy conditions than the shock of Elizabeth's scornful refusal acting on a nature *ex hypothesi* generous. Nothing in even our author is finer and more delicately touched than the change of his demeanour at the sudden meeting in the grounds of Pemberley. Had he been a bad prig or a bad coxcomb, he might have been still smarting under his rejection, or suspicious that the girl had come husband-hunting. His being neither is exactly consistent with the probable feelings of a man spoilt in the common sense, but not really injured in disposition, and thoroughly in love. As for his being in love, Elizabeth has given as just an exposition of the causes of that phenomenon as Darcy has of the conditions of his unregenerate state, only she has of course not counted in what was due to her own personal charm.

The secret of that charm many men and not a few women, from Miss Austen herself downwards, have felt, and like most charms it is a thing rather to be felt than to be explained. Elizabeth of course belongs to the *allegro* or *allegra* division of the army of Venus. Miss Austen was always provokingly chary of description in

regard to her beauties; and except the fine eyes, and a hint or two that she had at any rate sometimes a bright complexion, and was not very tall, we hear nothing about her looks. But her chief difference from other heroines of the lively type seems to lie first in her being distinctly clever—almost strong-minded, in the better sense of that objectionable word—and secondly in her being entirely destitute of ill-nature for all her propensity to tease and the sharpness of her tongue. Elizabeth can give at least as good as she gets when she is attacked; but she never “scratches”, and she never attacks first. Some of the merest obsoletenesses of phrase and manner give one or two of her early speeches a slight pertness, but that is nothing, and when she comes to serious business, as in the great proposal scene with Darcy (which is, as it should be, the climax of the interest of the book), and in the final ladies’ battle with Lady Catherine, she is unexceptionable. Then, too, she is a perfectly natural girl. She does not disguise from herself or anybody that she resents Darcy’s first ill-mannered personality with as personal a feeling. (By the way, the reproach that the ill-manners of this speech are overdone is certainly unjust; for things of the same kind, expressed no doubt less stiltedly but more coarsely, might have been heard in more than one ball-room during this very year from persons who ought to have been no worse bred than Darcy.) And she lets the injury done to Jane and the contempt shown to the rest of her family aggravate this resentment in the healthiest way in the world.

Still, all this does not explain her charm, which,

taking beauty as a common form of all heroines, may perhaps consist in the addition to her playfulness, her wit, her affectionate and natural disposition, of a certain fearlessness very uncommon in heroines of her type and age. Nearly all of them would have been in speechless awe of the magnificent Darcy; nearly all of them would have palpitated and fluttered at the idea of proposals, even naughty ones, from the fascinating Wickham. Elizabeth, with nothing offensive, nothing *viraginous*, nothing of the "New Woman" about her, has by nature what the best modern (not "new") women have by education and experience, a perfect freedom from the idea that all men may bully her if they choose, and that most will run away with her if they can. Though not in the least "impudent and mannish grown", she has no mere sensibility, no nasty niceness, about her. The form of passion common and likely to seem natural in Miss Austen's day was so invariably connected with the display of one or the other, or both of these qualities, that she has not made Elizabeth outwardly passionate. But I, at least, have not the slightest doubt that she would have married Darcy just as willingly without Pemberley as with it, and anybody who can read between lines will not find the lovers' conversations in the final chapters so frigid as they might have looked to the Della Cruscans of their own day, and perhaps do look to the Della Cruscans of this.

And, after all, what is the good of seeking for the reason of charm?—it is there. There were better sense in the sad mechanic exercise of determining the reason of its absence where it is not. In the novels of the last

hundred years there are vast numbers of young ladies with whom it might be a pleasure to fall in love; there are at least five with whom, as it seems to me, no man of taste and spirit can help doing so. Their names are, in chronological order, Elizabeth Bennet, Diana Vernon, Argemone Lavington, Beatrix Esmond, and Barbara Grant. I should have been most in love with Beatrix and Argemone; I should, I think, for mere occasional companionship, have preferred Diana and Barbara. But to live with and to marry, I do not know that any one of the four can come into competition with Elizabeth.

1894

PEACOCK  
MAID MARIAN  
AND  
CROTCHET CASTLE

DURING many years' reading, with ever fresh enjoyment, of Peacock's novels, I had until quite the other day—indeed until a time later than that at which I undertook the pleasant duty of writing this preface—been unable to understand what special model the author had had before him in these unique performances. Lord Houghton had noticed, and nobody who had any knowledge of the subject was likely to gainsay, the obvious indebtedness of Peacock to the French tale-tellers of the eighteenth century, from Anthony Hamilton to Pigault-Lebrun—though, by the way, Lord Houghton's attribution of the *Compère Mathieu* to Pigault-Lebrun was a mistake, or more probably a slip of memory. But in the model which Hamilton set, which Voltaire borrowed, and which others imitated from Voltaire, there was a very great deal which is quite different from Peacock—different not merely in the details (where difference was necessary, considering the time and country of the writers), but in other ways much more important. I had not solved the problem when, some nine years since, I first wrote about Peacock in *Macmillan's Magazine*, and I have not noticed that



anybody has ever solved it. But a month or two ago I happened to be reading for a different purpose the old English version of Marmontel's *Contes Moraux*—a book which in the original I had not read since a period before that at which I “commenced Peacockian”. And it so happened that one of the first things I hit upon was the phrase “the beautiful Cephalis” in the English version of *Les Mariages Samnites*.

It would be an insult to any practised reader of Peacock, and will be unnecessary when in a later volume of this series *Headlong Hall* has reappeared, to explain to others how and why the train at once caught fire. “Cephalis” is not a common name: the adjective attached to it in the two writers alike as a sort of perpetual epithet connects the pair still closer; and though in Peacock the name itself has a special propriety, though in Marmontel it is perfectly general, this, the Englishman being the later writer of the two, does not invalidate, but, on the contrary, strengthens the coincidence.

Nor have I any doubt that these famous *Moral Tales*, which were immensely popular in England exactly at the time when Peacock was a boy and a very young man, give the line between the Hamiltonian-Voltairian *conte* and Peacock. In them the fantastic-sarcastic story is brought more home to the actual society of the day than is the case in Voltaire's own. In them, though Marmontel submitted more than Peacock ever did to the “philosophical” fads and crazes of his own day, the undercurrent of satirical criticism on these fads is distinctly apparent. In both a slightly (not by any means

more than slightly) pagan disposition to blink positive doctrines is made up by a vigorous advocacy of good fellowship and the general moral virtues, which stops a good deal short of the all-pervading depreciation of "the Patriarch". In both there is a quasi-romantic touch. And in both, let me add, there is evidence of that latent conservatism which made the *philosophe* Marmontel in his later days a stout reactionary, and which causes little quivers (very delightful to behold) in English advocates of Progress who try to excuse and belittle at the same moment the senile delinquencies of Peacock.

This, however, is only a curiosity of literature which happens to have come from the accident of studying two authors, both known, but one long neglected, at the same time. It seemed worth mentioning, but need not be further pursued. For there is much more in Peacock, especially for an Englishman, and an Englishman of our day, than his indebtedness to the French *conteurs*, and the main interest of the juxtaposition of them is that it supplies one more of those literary filiations which are the most interesting things in literary study. Nothing comes of nothing; and though there is absolutely no more foolish and useless style of criticism than that which would fain make out that somebody copied somebody else, there is none more sage and more fruitful than that which endeavours to find out what somebody had in his mind, consciously or unconsciously, when he wrote something.

That Thomas Love Peacock, who was born at Weymouth on the 18th of October 1785, and who did not

begin novel-writing till he was past thirty, had at any rate the famous French *philosophes* writers of the eighteenth century in his mind when he began to write is not probable, but certain. His father was a London glass-merchant of St. Paul's Churchyard; and it is a little amusing, considering the son's most reprehensible attacks on the Scottish nation, that he was himself baptized, not at the place of his birth, but at the Scotch Kirk, London Wall. His second name was derived from his mother's family, who seem to have been mostly naval in profession, and counted representatives in those famous days of the English fleet ranging in rank from Master to Admiral. The Master, Thomas Love, Peacock's maternal grandfather, had a leg shot off in the great battle off Dominica when Rodney brought back victory to the flag of Britain. And with this grandfather (for his father died when he was only three years old) Peacock and his widowed mother had their headquarters from 1788 to the end of the century, at Chertsey: where Peacock himself would seem to have begun that worship of "the genius of the Thames" which never left him.

The history of Peacock's education is peculiar and almost unique. For six years and a half, according to his own account—for five, according to that of his granddaughter—by both, for a period which ended before he was thirteen—he was at a private school at Englefield Green, kept by a certain Mr. Wicks. It is perhaps necessary to impress on the present generation that before the enormous reorganisation of public and "grammar" schools and their endowments which the last fifty, and

especially the last thirty, years have seen, the private school occupied a much higher place than it has done since. But it is tolerably certain that at no time could any school communicate to a boy between seven and thirteen such a grounding of scholarly acquirement, in tongues both ancient and modern, as Peacock possessed, unless the boy was himself an extremely exceptional person. It appears quite certain that from this mature age of thirteen Peacock never had any pastor or master at all; and it is equally certain that however he may have missed some niceties of scholarship (he certainly had a bad habit of writing his Greek without accents), he was in point of metric and of archaeology generally no mean scholar in the strictest sense, while he was altogether exceptionally well read in Greek, Latin, Italian, and French. It is possible that like many irregularly educated men he gave himself some airs, and was a little paradoxical in his display of classical lore. I own that I am quite unable to share his admiration for Nonnus, though, to give that Panopolitan his last chance, I once took him with me on a solitary holiday as sole literature. And it is certain that he indulged in many foolish and hurtful gibes at the Universities, forgetful that though a fox with his tail on may gracefully dwell on the superfluity of that implement, a fox with his tail off had very much better not do so. But he did know classical literature and modern, as far as Italian and French are concerned (Italian in all the great authors, French chiefly in those of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries), as very few men of his own day and, I fear, still fewer now knew or know them. He

was in fact soaked in all these; their matter was to him what hardly anything can be said to be to men of letters of our own day. He had it all at his fingers' ends, thought in it, adjusted it to everything that he did, read, and wrote of. He might really have been made Doctor of Letters—a degree at which, however, I very much fear he would have scoffed.

We do not know what happened between his leaving school at thirteen and his leaving Chertsey with his mother for London three years later; and, indeed, our knowledge of no part of his life can be said to be very full. He began to read at the British Museum as soon as he got to London, and in 1804 he began to publish (poetry of course) with Hookham, his life-long friend. Peacock's verse, it is universally allowed, may be divided into two parts—the poems which he published independently, and the songs in his novels. Although it would be false and uncritical to say that the two might have been written by two different persons, the difference of character and merit between them is extraordinary. The best of the novel pieces—and nearly all of these are of the best—defy improvement and securely challenge competition. No Englishman has ever written such drinking songs as Peacock's drinking songs, not merely of the thick-headedly or furiously jovial, but of the higher kind. No man who has written three such pieces in three such different styles as "The War-Song of Dinas Vawr" in *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, "The Pool of the Diving Friar" in *Crochet Castle*, and "Love and Age" in *Gryll Grange*, need fear to hold up his head in any session of the poets. But the

mass of his poetical work is emphatically minor—emphatically of the same kind which the reviewer meets in scores of volumes—generally worse, sometimes as good, very seldom better—every year now, which is sometimes wildly extolled, sometimes made the subject of cheap sarcasm, generally ignored. As almost invariably happens in such cases, the occasional things are often good. Of the more serious attempts, the chief of which are *Rhododaphne* and *The Genius of the Thames*, it is impossible to say more than that they are estimable, and show that the poet had his ears open and his tongue not tied.

After five or six years in London, Peacock seems to have retired once more to Chertsey, and there he fell in love; which love being crossed by some malign agency, the young lady married somebody else and shortly died. She was never forgotten by Peacock, whose best serious verses except "Love and Age"—those on "Revisiting Newark Abbey"—she inspired five-and-thirty years later, while he is said to have dreamt of her just before his death after nearly five-and-twenty more. His pecuniary circumstances are not accurately known, but from the history of his life up to this point it would appear that he had some small independence, as he was bred to no profession. Now, however, either to relieve his disappointment or for some other reason, he undertook the rather unexpected duty (suggested, it may be supposed, by his ancestral connections with the navy) of an under-secretaryship to Admiral Sir Home Popham on board the *Venerable*. But he did not like it at all, and seems to have held the appointment but a few months. Soli-

tary pedestrian tours and poetry (*The Genius of the Thames* appeared in 1810) now occupied him chiefly. On one of his walks in Wales he met his future wife, Miss Griffith, and on another the Shelleys—a meeting which resulted in his becoming Shelley's intimate friend, his executor, and—though the statement seems to annoy some fanatics—his best and most trustworthy contemporary biographer by far, albeit the biography is only scrappy and partly in the form of fiction. His headquarters seem still to have been Chertsey, and he did a great deal of miscellaneous literary work—of the kind called hack-work when a man does it because he is obliged. Peacock apparently did it for his amusement, composing dramas (he was always fond of the stage) which were never acted, and are said not to have deserved acting, translating French novels, and executing newspaper work of various kinds.

An end was put to this dissipation of his powers, or to this period of maturing them, whichever phrase be preferred, by the appearance in 1816 of *Headlong Hall*, the first of his characteristic performances in fiction; and though by no means the best, a fully sufficient indication of the new and original talent which had been added to English literature. He was now living at Marlow (he was the cause of the Shelleys coming there), and for three or four years his pen was distinctly active, *Melincourt* following *Headlong Hall* in 1817, while the next year saw the delightful whimsy of *Nightmare Abbey* in prose, and *Rhododaphne*, Peacock's most elaborate and last formal attempt in verse, as well as the odd and not uninteresting *Ballad of Sir Hornbook*.

The incident which changed Peacock's career and fortunes in 1819 will probably serve, as long as there are men of letters, as a basis for the unavailing wish that the directors of the East India Company in that year could have been taken and cut into little stars and made to rain good influence from the firmament for ever. Nothing to the merely average or business man, who dispenses patronage as a director or a minister, could seem less of a testimonial for a clerkship in a public or semi-public office, than the absence of any regular education or professional training, the pursuance up to nearly "the middle of the road" of a perfectly idle life, and the production of three novels, instinct with mischievous cynicism, and a handful of verse. Yet we are authoritatively informed that these and no others were the qualifications which, apparently without even his own application, procured for Peacock the offer of a post which in a very short time brought him in £800 a year, and ultimately £2500, with heavy gratuities at different times, and a very large pension after (it is true) very long and very good service.

For the Company had beyond question as good a bargain in Peacock as Peacock had good luck in being selected by the Company. His duties appear to have been multifarious, if not oppressive, and sometimes of a very important nature,—as when, the old naval blood coming out in him, he on the one side brought about steam navigation to India, and on the other started flotillas of heavily-armed gunboats with light draught for river service in the East. His work and some domestic troubles (for he had married after obtaining



his clerkship, and his wife soon became a confirmed invalid) seem for many years to have checked his literary exercises; perhaps also his peculiar style was thought ill suited to an official; but he by no means gave novel-writing up either suddenly or entirely. *Maid Marian* came out in 1822, and was very popular both in itself and as the basis of Planché's operetta with Bishop's music. It was immediately after this that Peacock took the cottage at Halliford, which was his chief, and latterly his only home. But seven years passed before *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (which is read by some with a keener pleasure than anything else of his) appeared in 1829; and though this relapse was followed in 1831 by another in *Crotchet Castle*—which opens the present series with *Maid Marian*, and is by general consent the completest and urbanest product of the author's genius—more than twenty years passed after this without anything of consequence appearing from him, and nearly thirty before his last novel, *Gryll Grange*, came (in 1860) to show such a maintenance of power, of a kind seldom preserved in age, as hardly any other writer of seventy-five has exhibited. For some years before this later date Peacock had been a contributor of articles (but a few of which have as yet been reprinted) to *Fraser's Magazine*, and it was there that *Gryll Grange* first appeared. He died on the 23rd of January 1866.

Although of late years diligent attempts have been made to increase the rather scanty store of direct personal knowledge about Peacock, it cannot be said that they have been very successful; nor is this surprising. He died nearly thirty years ago, a very old man, who

had for many years lived in almost complete retirement; he had at no time been given to miscellaneous society, and he had a dislike to writing letters. Almost his only constant correspondent was Lord Broughton (better known as Byron's friend Hobhouse), and his letters to Lord Broughton are sealed up for another half-dozen years with the rest of the Broughton correspondence. Even at the time when he mixed in the Shelley circle—which, whatever its merits or demerits, cannot be accused of a churlish refusal to take posterity into its confidence—the references to Peacock by Hogg, Leigh Hunt, and others are not numerous, and give us the idea of a man who was not given to “communicate himself”, as the French say. That he was a pretty boy, a handsome youth, and a man both in middle and old age of extremely striking presence, all agree, and the portraits confirm it. That his hair “grew all from the top of his head”, as his granddaughter says, was peculiar rather to his generation than to him—this “tously” growth, the reaction from generations of shaven polls and wigs or queues, being traceable in all portraits of the period, from those of Lockhart, the great exemplar of the style, to Thackeray's sketches of his handsome young men in the forties. It would seem that he had a rather irascible temper, but was in most respects an “Epicurean animal”, as the poet has it, as little indifferent to creature comforts as we should expect from his books, kind rather because the pleasure of others is a pleasure and the pain of others a pain than from pure unselfishness, certainly not indifferent to the *honestum*, but very distinctly preferring the *dulce* to the

*utile* (which latter he ranked the lowest of all), and a little careless of abstract truths.

Such a character, if we add to it an extraordinarily keen faculty of humorous and ironic observation and expression, a youth of learned and varied leisure, wide reading, and latterly no small experience in practical affairs, is quite sufficiently comprehensible in the author of the novels; and the interest of these latter is certainly not by any means diminished either in quality or quantity by the fact that a little—nay, that a good deal—remains unexplained in Peacock. We know his tastes well, but we are left considerably in the dark as to his opinions, not merely in politics, where Lord Houghton, no obtuse inquirer, complained of “obscurity”, but in regard to almost all the greater subjects and many lesser ones. Albany Fonblanque certainly did not justify what some people are inclined to think a vastly overrated reputation for intellectual alertness by attempting what Dr. Garnett, a sympathiser with Fonblanque here, calls an apology for the satirist, “from the Liberal point of view certainly not superfluous”. It may perhaps be permitted to doubt whether Peacock had any definite opinions of the reasoned and closely connected kind, and that he was at any time a “Liberal” is from his earliest novels, as from his latest, unbelievable. A man of his type always laughs at the most prevailing, and therefore the most irritating, absurdities of his day. When Peacock first wrote, these follies were still, though they were ceasing to be, on the side of Toryism and opposition to Progress. By the time of *Crotchet Castle* they were mainly, by the time of *Gryll*

*Grange* almost entirely, on the other side—on the side of Progress itself. The battery had not shifted its position, but the battalions that exposed themselves to its fire were different. And it must seem a little curious that while some reactionaries are quite ungalled by its earlier discharges, considerable discomfort should be exhibited by those of different opinion at the execution effected by the later. Nobody who cannot stand raillery in respect of his own private opinions can expect thoroughly to enjoy Peacock; but it is surprising that anyone's opinions should be so tender as to shrink from him.

Most of what has to be said as to the contents and character of Peacock's novels will find most appropriate place in prefatory observations to the respective novels themselves; but some general remarks on the character which pervades them all may be fitly given here. The remarks made above as to Peacock's relations to Marmontel, and the French tale-tellers generally, will have prepared the reader who is a newcomer for the general class of novel which he is here to expect. It is not in strictness either a novel or a *nouvelle*, either a romance or a *roman*; it is most properly and strictly a "tale" in the sense which that English word only indicates in common with numerous other senses, but which is distinctly and definitely designated by the French *conte*. There is in all the books, or at least in all but *Headlong Hall* (which can hardly be said to have any), some kind of a story; but it is a story of the very simplest kind, and so destitute of complicated plot that some have been in the habit of denying Peacock plot at all, which is ex-

cessive. It is mostly very short; and the two exceptions, *Melincourt* and *Gryll Grange*, cannot be said to be long. It has for the most part (for the exceptions here, *Maid Marian* and *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, are rather apparent and accidental than essential and real) a single stage and almost a single scene, with a few excursions—to wit, a country house in which a party of more or less representative and pretty generally eccentric persons are assembled. The obligatory love-interest is never neglected, but it can hardly be said ever to constitute great part of the appeal, and is, as a rule, made subservient to the general ironic intent.

As for the characters, they begin by being almost purely representative and almost allegorical, except that they have the lively personality which allegorical figures seldom, save in the hands of Bunyan, attain. Some of them are used to symbolise—and to be bombarded with the author's wit as substitutes for—prominent personages in politics or literature whom he disliked. The Lake Poets—of whom, as is obvious from the very manner of attack, he can have had no personal knowledge, but whom he disliked partly as political deserters and partly as literary enemies of his own friends—do a great deal of severe duty in this respect in the first three novels, and are not entirely spared till the last of all; while Canning and other Tory chiefs receive in the earlier the attacks which Lord Brougham, Lord John Russell, and other Liberals have to bear in the later. Occasionally, but very rarely, as in the Scythrop of *Nightmare Abbey*, Peacock transforms a fanciful caricature of an actual person (in this case

Shelley) into a lifelike and abiding creation; twice, in the Brother Michael of *Maid Marian* and the Seithenyn of *Elphin*, he makes fantastic personages of the highest merit; once at least, in the Dr. Folliott of *Crotchet Castle*, he draws a real and possible figure of his own time with extraordinary *verve* and success.

At the other and worse end of the scale he is rather fond of bringing in doleful creatures with nicknames, who are, as it were, mere labelled dummies, set up to receive shots at their various fads and follies. But the majority of his characters stand between these extremes, and if seldom reaching the highest level of fictitious reality, have a tolerably firm footing upon a level a little lower, and do their work, especially in conversation, excellently.

Conversation indeed is one of Peacock's very strongest points. At first he was rather too apt to bolster it out with elaborate dissertations, which, though written with too much liveliness to be dull to any instructed taste, were doubtfully in keeping, and sure to annoy and perplex a large number of readers. But by the date of even the earliest novel contained in the present volume he had shaken this off, and attained a style of piquant talk, with the irony and the epigram never overdone, but always present, which stands almost by itself in English, and helps more than anything else to communicate to his novels the singular relish which they have for certain palates. This style extends to the narrative part and framework of the novels as well, while these also contain some set passages of description, etc., which have very high merit as examples of the older-

fashioned—but not, I hope, even yet, old-fashioned—style of proportion and order, as yet untouched by the neo-classicism of Landor, the exuberance of De Quincey and Wilson, the daring innovations of Carlyle, and the word-painting of Mr. Ruskin.

One of the chief attractions remains to be mentioned, though it has been alluded to. This is the interspersing of the prose with a considerable quantity of almost always good and sometimes extraordinarily original and brilliant verse in the forms of drinking songs, ballads, epigrams, casual snatches and catches, pieces of sentiment, and occasional verse in very great variety.

The general idea which all these means are employed to illustrate and enforce cannot be better put than in the motto of the novel with which, somewhat out of chronological order, but with advantages of other kinds to compensate, we open this issue of Peacock—

Le monde est plein de fous, et qui n'en veut pas voir  
Doit se tenir tout seul, et casser son miroir.

It is a point of view to which the brighter kind of wits takes very readily; but when the point of view is translated into a point of action and production, a "basis of operations", then these wits are put to their mettle. Nothing more dubious and ephemeral than second-rate, nothing more insipid and intolerable than third-rate or lower satire of humanity, puts in an appearance among the kinds of literature. Nothing more absolutely sure of survival and of constant reception by the fittest exists than the first-rate variety of such satire. It would be too much to say—it would be a piece of

that fulsome assentation which only mistaken opinion expects from editors and introducers—that Peacock always attains to this first rank. He does not; and his oscillation between that rank and a lower one may be set down as due partly to a certain indolence—a defect in the highest union of capacity and endeavour—partly to the eccentricity of his education and career. But he is sometimes at almost the highest level, and with the rarest exceptions he is never very far below it. From the temptation of “pot-boiling”, which is never so fatal as in this kind of work, he was at all times removed by fortune; and his extreme fastidiousness saved him from the rarer and more incomprehensible fault of those who, having no temptation to write at all, have written too much. Some special traps into which he fell will be noticed in the following and in other pages. But on the whole, his appeal to those who see “the humour of it”, to whom (slightly to alter his own words) “nothing is too good to be laughed at, and few things so bad that they may not be laughed at” from certain points of view, is strong and almost unique. It has been, or might have been, said that the highest possible compliment is the phrase “*He’s no fool*”, with an italic stress on the “he”, which we sometimes speak and hear. There are few pages of Peacock at the foot of which this might not be written as a criticism, with the little touch of reflected self-congratulation at perceiving the absence of folly, which, perhaps, gives the phrase some of its zest. And are there very many writers of the nineteenth or any century on whose pages, even to give ourselves this titillation, we could write as much?



The two novels with which this issue of Peacock's work in fiction opens, though neither the first in order nor the longest, are perhaps those which "divide the least" (as a famous phrase has it) the admirers of the author. *Nightmare Abbey* has for some a more piquant flavour of sustained Rabelaisian farce which attains to true comedy; *The Misfortunes of Elphin* must always carry the suffrages of those who appreciate intense ironic presentation of mankind; and *Gryll Grange* has a more extensive and varied interest, a fresher modernity of subject, a milder and more mellow presentation of Peacock's view of life. But the first of these has still some crudity of method; the second, like the *Tale of a Tub* and *Jonathan Wild* (the captains of the company in which it is so admirable a lieutenant), shocks and disgusts some tastes by its austerity; and the third annoys many estimable persons by its irreverent satire of things which they have been brought up to respect. In all these ways no work of Peacock's can be exactly *pain bénit* to weak brethren. But the two which we now re-edit exhibit fewer stumbling-blocks to weak knees, fewer choke-pears to difficult swallows, than any of the others. *Crotchet Castle* is very frequently, and perhaps not erroneously, taken to be, all things considered, Peacock's most perfect work in his special vocation of modern satirist; *Maid Marian* is certainly his most charming essay in handling ancient themes.

The scheme which, as has been said, gives a common form to all Peacock's novels, except *Maid Marian* and *Elphin*, appears at perhaps its best in *Crotchet Castle*. This scheme is a sufficiently simple one, though the

originality of it is shown by the fact that nobody had exactly hit on it before, and the success of it by the fact that many people have more or less exactly followed it since. A company of folk representing partly general characteristics of mankind, partly special fads and crazes of the day, assemble in a country house and play each other off by provocation and competition. This playing off is assisted throughout the novels by the orthodox romantic interest of love-making—very faint in *Headlong Hall*; enhanced in *Melincourt*, after an old-fashioned kind, by rivalry and abduction; enlivened in *Nightmare Abbey* by a Germanic, or, as we should say now, Ibsenic outlining of a "double arrangement"; and much later extended to something like an ordinary novel plot in *Gryll Grange*. Here in *Crotchet Castle* the old love-or-money problem is brought in to perform this office; and it is illustrated in a criss-cross fashion by the suit of Captain Fitzchrome to Lady Clarinda, and the reparation made by Mr. Chainmail to the willow-wearing damsel, Susannah Touchandgo.

But Peacock, little as he cared for plot, was not (at least after *Headlong Hall*, where it appears chiefly in embryo) satisfied with this, and was wont to bring in a more or less independent appeal of some sort or sorts, which is provided in *Melincourt* by the Oran Haut-ton business and the journey to One-vote; in *Nightmare Abbey*, short as it is, by the intervention of Mr. Cypress; and in *Gryll Grange* by the Aristophanic Comedy. Here the canal voyage to North Wales does most of this business.

In the present book, however, and in *Gryll Grange*,

he has added yet a *third* ingredient, which unquestionably adds not a little to the flavour of the whole. In the earlier books he had only indicated his own opinion, or, without exactly indicating it, had criticised his characters by direct remarks in text or note, which were sometimes a little inartistic and always a little inurbane. In this book (and he followed the practice up through the personages of Dr. Opimian and Mr. MacBorrowdale in *Gryll Grange*) he has provided much more interesting choruses, so to speak, in Lady Clarinda and Dr. Folliott, expressing partly the author's own sentiments (which are not always quite judicial) and partly what may be called the common sense of impartial mankind. This latter gift is Lady Clarinda's peculiar excellence. It may perhaps be thought that in this lies the special value of the book; and it is certainly in this point that Peacock's followers have mostly failed. They have either forgotten the necessity of such personages, or they have attempted them maladroitly.

There are several minor beauties in *Crotchet Castle* which never fail to strike an accustomed reader. For instance, there is a sentence not far from the beginning of Chapter X which shows how much Peacock had learnt. He says, speaking of the word-combats of Mr. Mac Quedy and Dr. Folliott, "We would print these dialogues if we thought anyone would read them; but the world is not yet ripe". He *had* printed them in *Headlong Hall* and *Melincourt*, with the result of nearly swamping the first book, and in some judgments, though not in mine, quite swamping the second. He now knew better.

The singular prejudices, of which something has been said already, and more will have to be said later, are not, indeed, quite put to rest in *Crotchet Castle*. The discreditable and almost unintelligible illiberality towards the Lake Triad is much softened in the portraiture of Mr. Skionar (Coleridge), but reappears in a flash of spite at "his friends Mr. Wilful Wontsee (Wordsworth) and Mr. Rumblesack Shantsee (Southey)". The Scotch, or rather anti-Scotch, craze manifests itself in the attack on the *Edinburgh* instead of the *Quarterly*, in the outrageous and only partly humorous depreciation of Scott. Paper money as such is still a sore point with Peacock, and he cannot refrain from noting that the party "found nobody reading" at Oxford (in July!). But, on the whole, there is a distinct improvement in these respects; while the book can scarcely, especially when we consider the lively attacks on Brougham and the "diffusion of knowledge" people, be said to lack pungency. It is, in fact, in this meeting of the ways, in the discarding of a personality which went near to bad taste, and the acquisition of an equity which is never merely insipid, that the charm of the work consists.

It has, moreover, the general Peacockian attractions of character, dialogue, and interspersed verse in nearly, if not in quite, the highest degree. Dr. Folliott would probably hold the top of the poll in a ballot of Peacock's admirers for his best character, and I should split what votes I might have on the cumulative system for Lady Clarinda to accompany him. Slightly as she is painted, there are few better outline portraits of one of the most

charming types of women. Miss Touchandgo, though a little too "sensible" in the eighteenth-century sense, is a great advance on Anthelia in *Melincourt*, and for her date not inferior to Miss Niphet in *Gryll Grange*. The rapid succession of the different scenes and the brisk rapier-play of the conversation cannot be surpassed anywhere even in Peacock, who had now thoroughly acquired practice in it, and who seems, on the point of dropping literature altogether for twenty and prose fiction for thirty years, to have mustered his whole skill for the occasion.

And some of the verses are sublime. "The Pool of the Diving Friar" is not so much of a comparative favourite with me as it is with some people; but its positive merit is beyond dispute. The satire on Brougham (not included in the first edition) is good, but not first-rate; and the versions of old *fabliaux* do not please me very much either as versions or in themselves. Peacock, with all his originality, could not get out of the eighteenth-century habit of "namby-pambyfying" the Middle Ages as soon as he left off simply abusing them. But

If I drink water while this doth last

is perfection; and it is a strange addition to its interest that it was a swan-song. Peacock, I trust, and indeed partly know, drank good wine for nearly forty years more. He celebrated it in prose. But he never sang it again. The days of melodious conviviality were even then approaching their close.

The attractions of *Maid Marian* are different, but certainly not inferior. Peacock was a younger and

probably a merrier man when he wrote it; and though his own crotchets were in a less mellow condition than when he built the Castle of that same, it so happened that the scheme of the story gave comparatively little opportunity for questionable indulgence in them. He must needs have a fling at a servile and immoral Laureate in Harpiton, but it is the merest of flings. On the other hand, the delightful story which has inspired so many writers, from the unknown ballad-mongers to Lord Tennyson, and which by an odd though not uncommon coincidence was furnishing a subject to Sir Walter Scott at the very same time (for *Ivanhoe* and *Maid Marian* are independent contemporaries), has never been interpreted with more zest and freshness than here. Nor could it perhaps have been anticipated that a medieval story could be told by an extremely modern satirist with such a happy blending of irony and romance. But the fact is that for all his Voltairian tone and all his classical taste, there was a very strong romantic vein in Peacock from first to last.

It is well known that Planché and Bishop—the former with complimentary expressions, but without “with your leave or by your leave”, and in a manner which might have brought him into trouble with the law, turned *Maid Marian* into a comic opera which was extraordinarily popular and made many of the delightful snatches of verse which the novel contained familiar in the mouths of singing men and women. The liberty was to a certain extent atoned for by a reflected popularity for the novel itself, and *Maid Marian* might probably have been found a generation ago in many

libraries (as my own childish recollection enables me to say that it certainly was in one) which contained no other work of the author's. Peacock did not resent the proceeding, though his publisher was rather inclined to do so; indeed, like other disappointed playwrights in history or fiction, he was probably too delighted to appear on the boards at last to quarrel much with the manner of his appearance or the distribution of the profits thereof.

These songs are indeed among the most charming of their kind, and they possess a quality of "snatch" and unforced, natural, ballad-like lyrical movement, which even Scott himself never in the lighter way far surpassed, and which the very greatest poets of the day, Shelley, Coleridge, Keats, did not hit often. This quality appears at once in

The bramble, the bramble, the bonny forest bramble,  
which is said to have been the great hit of the opera; and it is well maintained in the graceless fragment beginning "The rose". The "Ballad of Kingslea Mere" anyone might have written; hardly so the exquisite pair of stanzas which close the second chapter, and are for meaning and music combined Peacock's best work in verse, which is neither merely Anacreontic nor distinctly sentimental. The scraps of song by which Matilda and the Friar arouse (I own I think not unjustly) the baron's wrath have more of that prepared impromptu style which the comic opera itself depends upon, and almost necessitates; but

A staff, a staff, of the young oak-graff

(which was once pleasingly varied from oral recitation,

A staff, a staff, for the young *O'Graff*)

rises much higher. "O bold Robin Hood" has obtained a wider and more durable fame than even the "Bramble", and the three songs that turn in different ways on the cry of "Over! Over!" and its revelation of Brother Michael's peccadillo have still greater verbal, if less musical, merit. Nor is the finale, though in eighteenth-century conventional style, to be despised either on that score or on its own merits.

And the prose is quite worthy of the verse. The gradual clearing and fining of Peacock's style which is noticeable in his successive novels had come almost to perfection (it did not, I think, quite reach that point till *The Misfortunes of Elphin*) in *Maid Marian*. We shall not find the crisp, quaint, and yet not in the least affected phrase of such a passage as—"I am very much obliged to you, sir," said the baron, "very exceedingly obliged. Your solicitude for my daughter is truly paternal; and for a young man and a stranger very singular and exemplary. And it is very kind, withal, to come to the relief of my inefficiency and inexperience, and concern yourself so much in that which concerns you not";—we shall not find it at all, or hardly at all, before *Nightmare Abbey*, and not with a quite certain sound in *Nightmare Abbey* itself. Also in less technical points than these of style *Maid Marian* shows immense improvement. There are no otiose characters like Mr. Asterias in *Nightmare Abbey*, like one or two even in *Crotchet Castle*; there is little digression and haranguing;



the incidents of the legend are neither lugged in with too ceremonious fidelity nor omitted and altered with too cavalier license. The whole moves with the nimblest and most agreeable combination of conversational and narrative "business". And always in the midst of the movement is the admirable figure of Brother Michael, perhaps the very best presentment of the "Goliardic" friar whom the Middle Age loved and the Renaissance in its very satire did not wholly hate. If only those three ghostly friars—Brother Michael, his double the Clerk of Copmanhurst, and their spiritual father in Rabelais—could meet together! It is delightful but almost terrible to think of the cracking of bottles, of jests, and of crowns that would celebrate that symposium.

## HEADLONG HALL AND NIGHTMARE ABBEY

In the two stories which this volume contains, but especially in the first, the reader will find Peacock's peculiar art and style in a more rudimentary condition than in either of the pieces which preceded them—in a condition, indeed, which may seem almost impossibly rudimentary when they are compared with *Crotchet Castle*. But there is nothing surprising in this, and, in that historic view which adds even more to the enjoyment than it does to the education of reading, it is a positive gain. When Peacock wrote *Crotchet Castle* he

was a man of forty-five, who had for the last ten years seen a great deal of affairs, and something—about as much as he ever cared to see—of society. When fourteen years earlier he wrote *Headlong Hall*, though he was not an exceedingly young man, he had lived a very retired life, had had few of the usual advantages of education, and had latterly consorted with a society in which talent was indeed abundant, and genius not rare, but which included hardly any but such as Mr. Pope, fresh from “my St. John” and Lady Mary, was good enough to designate as “poetical men”.

To this we must add the more commonplace but all-important fact that *Headlong Hall* was Peacock’s *coup d’essai*—that he was here trying his hand at something of which no Englishman had tried exactly the like before, and which, though it had models, tended away from these models almost in the act of imitating them. We see more in *Headlong Hall* than in any of its followers, except *Melincourt*, the influence of those *contes* which, as has been said, were beyond almost all doubt Peacock’s patterns. The discussions about perfectibilism and the rest, which, though (owing to the brevity of the book) they do not oppress the reader quite so much as is the case in *Melincourt*, bear perhaps an even larger proportion to the whole bulk, are just like those we find in Marmontel’s *Misanthrope Corrigé* and similar things. Nor, little as Peacock ever cared for plot, had he as yet learnt to make even so much of “the story” as he afterwards did; while the delightful power of character-creation which he was so soon to display is hardly yet reached. The incidents of the visit to Headlong Hall are

very few, and except the tumble of the father of "the beautiful Cephalis" into the lake, and the obliging cession of the skull by the sexton to Mr. Escot, none of them can be said to have much to do with any story. The personages are mostly ticketed rather than created; even of Mr. Escot himself, who is far the most elaborate, we have less personal idea than we have of any prominent character in Peacock's novels subsequent to *Melincourt*. Sometimes, as in the case of Mr. Panscope, even the label conveys little or no meaning, and we may feel considerable difficulty in discovering why the figure is introduced, or at least why it has a part which is something more than that of a mere super allotted to it. And lastly, the catastrophe would be somewhat farcical even for a farce. The pairing off of Escot and Foster is all very well, but the follow-my-leader conduct of Headlong and Sir Patrick, and the complete indifference—a little excessive even in a descendant of "Ap-Hurricane"—of the Squire between Tenorina and Graziosa "do seem going far".

Yet the book contains lively and ample assurance of the new talent which had arisen in prose fiction; and he must have been a reviewer not up to his business, or a reader not worthy of good literary food, who did not enjoy the present and anticipate the future. For *Headlong Hall* is full of vital signs. In the first place, there was the odd, quaint, vivid, satiric presentment, which could not seem small in force, and must have seemed novel in fashion even to a generation which had Canning, and Sydney Smith, and Moore, and had not forgotten Peter Pindar. It must have been obvious that the writer,

whoever he was (for not many could have known him), possessed in the first place very unusual and unhackneyed satirical powers, in the second a still less usual or hackneyed fashion of exerting them, and thirdly, one of the least commonplace and most promising bundles of prejudices and preferences. A satirist of the Universities, who was apparently full and fond of the classics; a political Liberal, who was pitiless on new fads, and distinctly sceptical of schemes for amelioration; a lampooner of the clergy for guzzling, who seemed to have at least a healthy appetite and a most formidable thirst of his own—these inconsistencies must have been more satisfactory than the most logical code or creed to the fit reader of *Headlong Hall*.

Some things which now look peculiar in the book were less strange to its first readers. The annotation (which indeed is less conspicuous in it than in *Melincourt*) had been put in fashion by various popular books, especially the *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* and the *Pursuits of Literature*; and the selection of "speaking" or punning names for the characters had been constant in the eighteenth-century essayists. Two of Peacock's most prominent characteristics, as they were soon to be, were indeed absent. Except Knight as Mr. Milestone, no actual person is very definitely made a butt of; for the attempts to identify the chorus of reviewers with the same real persons—Gifford, Southey, and the rest—whom Peacock afterwards attacked, are not, I think, very successful. But his red rags and black beasts in general—the Universities, the clergy, the profession of letters (which Peacock, though at most times he might have

been said to be rather more than an irregular member of it, generally selected as a target), above all anything in the nature of a fad or craze or merely fashionable taste, such as those of which Mrs. Pinmoney was to give such a formidable list in *Melincourt*—these things, it was obvious, were likely to be buzzed about, not to say stung, rather formidably by the new satirist. And in some of the touches a tolerably acute judge might have seen what was likely to come afterwards in the way of development both of the personal and the general irony.

There was another faculty of Peacock's which showed itself almost full fledged or blown in this brief and bright little performance. The age was an age of song-writing, and not least of convivial song-writing; but assuredly it had not seen much that could vie with the admirable things here given: things, be it remembered, that the said age not merely read but cheerfully piped after its own dinners and suppers. The liability to such an intolerable infliction as Miss Mary Bennet's performance at the supper—a ball supper too—in *Pride and Prejudice* must have been made slightly less atrocious by the chance of hearing and partaking in, even over Burgundy less super-excellent than Squire Headlong's, such things as the convivial songs in *Headlong Hall*. Not that the others are bad. "Oh! who art thou?" might be tolerable, even from lips less attractive than those of the beautiful Cephalis, though not very much can be said for Caprioletta's ballad. But the other three are gems. "Sir Peter" has, I believe, been the general favourite, but it seems to me inferior to both its com-

panions, and of those companions I cannot tell whether I like "A heeltap, a heeltap, I never could bear it", or the great Ap-Headlong chorus the better.

Less rare perhaps to those who first read it than to us (and the thought is likely to incline one rather to the views of Mr. Escot than to those of Mr. Foster or Mr. Jenkison) was the easy mirth of which this boisterous conviviality was only an outward and visible sign, the *joie de vivre*, the slightly indolent determination to laugh at folly, no doubt, and not to connive at wrongdoing, but to take all things pretty placidly, and enjoy all that could be enjoyed with a keen, if not exactly passionate, relish. If, as has been laid down by more than one person of very different tastes, the eighteenth century was the pleasantest century of the world to live in, something of this may be thought to appear in Peacock, our last spokesman, in point of date, who has preserved the temper of the eighteenth century in regard to such things, though observing and preserving pretty amply and very accurately the successive ways and manners of the nineteenth. Here, too, in the person of Mr. Mac Laurel (who seems to be *Quarterly* in politics and *Edinburgh* in nationality) is the first butt of that peculiar objection to Scotchmen which Peacock maintained until he made an apology for it by introducing Mr. MacBorrowdale in *Gryll Grange*, with all the honours.

The transition to *Nightmare Abbey* will show very pleasantly the great advance which Peacock had made in a very short time; the omission for convenience' sake of the very much longer novel of *Melincourt*, which came

between, serving to enhance the contrast. For though in the One-vote scenes of *Melincourt* and some others, there is a considerable advance on *Headlong Hall*, and though the scheme of rather distinctly personal satire which appears in *Nightmare Abbey* had also been anticipated by the second novel, *Melincourt* is as a whole much nearer to its elder than to its younger brother. Peacock had not yet arrived at the full art of handling crazes and crotchets lightly and in passing; he still followed his French masters in loading his tales with dissertations and long speeches; and he had not yet fully attained the knack of presenting a complete if slightly and farcically drawn character.

In all these respects *Nightmare Abbey* marks a quite extraordinary improvement. It is almost the same length to a page as *Headlong Hall*, but with the rarest exceptions (there are one or two) it has no *longueurs* as the earlier book had. The scheme may still be called farcical if anybody pleases: but it is farce of the altogether good kind, the Molièresque kind, where the reality of the characters more than atones for the improbability of the incidents. The central figure is of course Scythrop; and I really hardly know which is most amusing, the delineation of Scythrop himself, or the disgusted amaze of certain Shelley-maniacs at the idea that anybody could take him for Shelley. No one else can have much doubt about the matter, and one likes both Scythrop and Shelley better for the caricature. But Scythrop would be delicious even if the world were so very unfortunate as never to have had a Shelley. And even if we knew no original, he would still have the right satiric verisimili-

tude, which seems to be the very hardest thing to distinguish, for some readers' edification, from the exaggerated and the burlesque. Earlier, Peacock had seldom got beyond the latter, and he still shows signs of it here in Mr. Flosky, though Mr. Flosky is very amusing; in the Asterias couple, who are not amusing at all; and perhaps in one or two others. But the rest have crossed the line, the line impalpable, undefinable, to some it would seem undiscoverable, even when they are past it. Not merely Scythrop, but his father and his two beloveds, especially Marionetta (who indeed is hardly a caricature), and Mr. Toobad, the immortal Mr. Toobad (who doubtless never existed, but who has all the qualities of potential existence, and is alive in the world of ideas if not in that of Deceitful Form), and Mr. Listless (a little nearer to the burlesque) and Mr. Larynx (the first abandonment of the repulsive type of parson, though even Dr. Portpipe is a great improvement on Dr. Gaster) and Mr. Cypress, who is quite admirable, and the servants:—all have the benefit of this new and delightful vivification. That their life has something of the dream character about it—as indeed, being lived in Nightmare Abbey, it ought to have—is no doubt true. But then the life of dreams is intensely real, though the actual incidents are profoundly extravagant.

Next to the improvement in the lifelikeness as well as liveliness of the characters must be noticed, what indeed partly results from it, the improvement in the story. It is customary to disregard if not to apologise for Peacock as a plotter: and certainly he never bestowed, or from his scheme need have bestowed, much attention on this



part of the novelist's art. It has been observed that in *Headlong Hall* the novelist really has no story to tell us—a stage-coach journey, a walk, some table-talk, a ball and a marriage—that is all, with the slightest possible thread of connection between. In *Melincourt*, on the other hand, the loves of Anthelia and Forester with the intervening machination of Grovelgrub and Lord Anophel do provide something like a main plot, with the One-vote journey for a considerable episode. But it is thinly made out, and as a story hardly permits the reader to keep his eye on the links for the enormous intrusions of satire on mankind in Sir Oran Haut-ton and political economy in Mr. Fax.

In *Nightmare Abbey*, on the other hand, the "double arrangement", or alas! the failure of a double arrangement, between Scythrop, Marionetta, and Celinda, supplies a quite sufficient thread of interest, which is only variegated a little and not at all broken by the humours of the outsiders. I believe there has been, in Byron-worshippers, a little of the same sensitiveness on the score of Mr. Cypress which Shelley-worshippers have felt on the score of Scythrop: but the secure world need not trouble itself much about this. Of course, Mr. Cypress is not the whole Byron; and of course also there are some rather illiberal strictures (of the kind to which, as has been acknowledged in the general introduction, Peacock was only too prone) both on Byron, on Scott, on the Lakists, and perhaps on others, though not on Shelley. The silliest, and as it happens, oddly enough, the worst written thing that Peacock ever wrote occurs here in the breathless and brainless out-

burst of spleen at Burke and Southey which figures as a note. But a certain side, and a main one too, of Byron is excellently caricatured in Mr. Cypress.

Mr. Flosky is more elaborate and therefore more amusing, though here, as always, Peacock seems either to have been unable, or not to have cared, to ascertain what his detested Lakers were really like. But this appertains rather to the discussion of *Melincourt*, and may be relegated to the introduction to that book. Of the other personages, it is only necessary to say that Marionetta is really charming; that Celinda, all things being put together, deserves a rather less enthusiastic description; that Mr. Toobad is as priceless as he is extravagant; and that whether Mr. Christopher Glowry has any resemblances to Sir Timothy Shelley or not, he is an almost excessively affectionate father, and an extremely amusing person. Some of the satire on pessimist tendencies in literature has acquired in the last few years a new and not insignificant appropriateness.

The songs are better than ever; indeed, Peacock hardly surpassed them. The very dubious quality called "archness"—of which the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth were much enamoured, and which is unquestionably delightful at its best, but terribly likely to decline into vulgarity on the one hand and affectation on the other—has never been better exemplified than in Marionetta's song, "Why are thy looks so blank, grey friar?" I have never been able to make out whether Peacock understood and intended the enormous inferiority of the last quatrain of Mr. Cypress's song, "There is a fever of the spirit" (by

general consent the finest parody ever written that is not a direct parody of one particular thing), or whether he was insensible to it. But the first twelve lines are sublime. As for the catch that follows, the same adjective and no other will suffice for it. It disputes with one or two of its own companions in Peacock's works, and with no others, the palm of the very best of all modern drinking-songs. I have already said that I am inclined to put the final effort, the "Farewell to Conviviality" of *Crotchet Castle*, "If I drink water while this doth last", a little above it; but even this is an opinion as to which I find myself vacillating from year to year, and from day to day. Both are, I think, better, though not so very much better, than "The Ghosts" of *Melincourt* and the tumultuous choruses of *Headlong Hall*; the songs of *Maid Marian* and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* fall into a somewhat different category. And I should not be inclined to quarrel with anyone who maintained that "Seamen Three" was the very best of all; and the most appropriate to that true vinous enthusiasm which is equally far from sottish excess and from water-toast jejuneness.

## MELINCOURT

*Melincourt* is usually considered the least interesting of Peacock's novels; and in the strictly comparative sense—that is to say that it is the least interesting of a group, every one of which has peculiar and exceptional

interest—the statement is no doubt true. The defects of the book are very obvious, and exceedingly easy to account for. *Headlong Hall* had been very popular; and it was only in the course of nature that the author should repeat his successful experiment. But *Headlong Hall* had been by no means free from faults; and it certainly was not out of the course of nature that they should reappear in the new venture. In the very noteworthy introduction which the author wrote nearly forty years later, and which contains the promise of *Gryll Grange* as supplement to complete the satire, it is not unimportant to observe that he pays no attention to anything but the satirical purport. A man of seventy, satiated with business and not specially hungering after popularity, was not perhaps very likely to discuss his own novels in detail, even to the extent to which Scott and other persons of irreproachable taste have discussed theirs in separate or collected editions. But it is not extravagant to take his silence as a kind of indication of his point of view.

His practice, however, if not his expressed theory, testifies to a consciousness that he had made a mistake in the scale of this novel. *Nightmare Abbey*, the next, is only just a third of its length: no two of the next three, even if added together, come up to it; and though *Gryll Grange* is not so very much shorter, *Gryll Grange* contains the accumulated irony of a lifetime, and is not open to any of the objections to which *Melincourt* is exposed.

These objections, put briefly, come to this, that the author has not yet acquired the knack of telling a story,

and that he has not discarded the habit of inapposite dissertation. There is truth in this summary, sharp and blunt at once as it is, and there is probably no reader who will not sometimes put up a prayer for the excision, extinction, expulsion, and general extermination of Mr. Fax. But political economy had always been a favourite subject of Peacock's French masters; it had acquired, through Malthus (of whom Mr. Fax has sometimes been thought to be a Peacockian portrait), considerable vogue in England; and we have seen it reappear in our own time as a loading or padding to novels. Mr. Forester's anti-saccharine fervour was a real thing for many years after *Melincourt* was published—though I have never heard whether the amiable anti-saccharists or their descendants have founded any association to weep for the ruin of the West India planters first, and the West India Islands afterwards.

Two other kinds of purpose appear in the novel, both of them distinctly political. In *Headlong Hall* the attack on the *Quarterly Review* had been tolerably obvious, but it had kept, if not entirely, yet mainly free of personalities. The scenes at Cimmerian Lodge and Mainchance Villa, with Mr. Feathernest's sojourn at Melincourt, substitute for this impersonality a directness of personal lampoon as to the taste of which there cannot be very much question, while as to the justice and accuracy of it there cannot be, and among rational people of both sides never has been, any but one opinion. Mr. Vamp (Gifford), Mr. Anyside Antijack (Canning), and Mr. Killthedeade (believed to be Barrow, Secretary to the Admiralty, and a well-known writer on

naval subjects), were perhaps fair game, for the two last were public men—in other words, public targets—and Gifford had only himself to blame if, after playing all his life at the roughest and most vicious of bowls, he got some rubbers. But the animus, the injustice, and, above all, the ludicrous inaccuracy of the attacks on Coleridge (Mr. Mystic), Southey (Mr. Feathernest), and Wordsworth (Mr. Paperstamp) are still almost inconceivable. That there was a certain superficial justification for accusing them all, especially Coleridge and Southey, of rather remarkable changes of opinion, that Coleridge was apt to be a little transcendental, and so forth, may be granted. But the attempt to carry the satire on to their moral and personal conduct is not only unjustifiable in itself, but displays a quite ludicrous ignorance and recklessness. Coleridge, heaven knows, was open enough to satire; and if Peacock had known anything whatever about him, he might have made a rather terrible exposure. But “Mr. Mystic”, with his elaborate establishment at Cimmerian Lodge, is so unlike the fugitive philosopher who seldom had where to lay his head except in other men’s houses, that even amusement is difficult. And when we remember the style of living in which Wordsworth, even at his wealthiest, indulged, and his tastes in all matters of art, coarse and fine, the extensive dinner-party at Mainchance Villa and its “mighty claret-shed” become a very poor jest. The “sooth bourd” may be “nae bourd”, but the bourd which is altogether and glaringly opposite to the truth is a good deal worse. Most inexcusable of the three attacks, however, is that on Southey, which, I am

sorry to say, is renewed (as it were, *sotto voce*) by the allusions to "Mr. Sackbut" in *Nightmare Abbey*. That Southey gave some provocation to the irregulars of the Whig party by his slightly pharisaic airs of virtue, and some handle not merely by his curious political history, but by his more voluminous than impeccable poetical work, is undeniable. But to represent him as a rascal, though it might be worthy of Byron, was not worthy of Peacock; and to represent him as selling his soul for the pittance of the laureateship was unpardonable. Southey, as Shelley himself and many others of Peacock's friends could have told the author of *Melincourt*, "feathered his nest" with nothing but books, worked like a navvy (only that the navvy works in bursts and Southey worked unceasingly), at the least paying kinds of literature, in order to procure that lining, and lived, though not sordidly, with the utmost simplicity. It would perhaps be less difficult to forgive this unfairness if the result were more amusing, but, as it is, Peacock is condemned by the laws of art no less than by those of ethics.

He was quite infinitely more fortunate in his other political foray—the satire on rotten boroughs in the history of the One-vote election. The rotten-borough system may have had its advantages, but nobody ever denied that it lent itself admirably to satire; and I am rather inclined to fix on this as the first complete example of Peacock's method of sarcastic exposure. Indeed, "Mr. Sarcastic" himself, unless my imagination deceives me, comes nearer to Peacock's own character than almost any other of his personages. And the whole

thing, in a bravura style, is capital. It is indeed sad to notice that the constant legislative curtailments of the picturesque and pleasing in politics have quite recently done away with the last shred of actuality in the One-vote episode. For it was recorded, during the first Parish Council elections recently, that an actual Mr. Christopher Corporate was practically disfranchised because, though he proposed his candidate, and might have voted for him, he was not allowed as a seconder, and no other existed.

The not sarcastic or not purely sarcastic scenes and personages of the novel have considerable merit, which would be more easily perceptible if they were not kept apart from each other by so much of the Fax-and-Forester business. Anthelia has excited interest and admiration as a reminiscence of Peacock's first love, and a first draft of the more perfectly conceived Susannah Touchandgo in *Crotchet Castle*. They both exhibit—with some modern touches, chiefly in the latter of the pair—the sentimental but intelligent heroine of the last century. Mrs. Pinmoney and her daughter are slight, but good, and the former's list of tastes is a capital passage; while Sir Telegraph Paxarett is an excellent personage, showing something of Thackeray's partiality for making a young man of fashion not quite a coxcomb, such as the older novelists had been prone to draw him. Mr. Derrydown, who is a sort of first sketch of Mr. Chainmail in *Crotchet Castle*, is a very intelligent medievalist; and the "supers", Mr. O'Scarum and the rest, play their parts very well.

These compliments, however, will hardly extend to



the hero or the villains, though they apply with redoubled force to Sir Oran Haut-ton. The quadrumanous baronet, indeed, is such an excellent fellow, that one almost wishes he could have been discovered to be no Orang at all, but a baby lost early in the woods, could have recovered his speech, improved his good looks, and married Anthelia. For his patron, friend, rival, and almost namesake, Sylvan Forester, is a terrible prig and bore. It is difficult to believe that Peacock can have sympathised with him, and impossible not to think that he simply followed the old theory of the good young hero, as he did other old theories in the elopement and recovery. But Mr. Forester is not much worse than the villains. Grovelgrub indeed, though he is much worse than Portpipe (who is not detestable), and is the sequel to Gaster in Peacock's curious warfare against the clergy, has a touch of wit now and then. But Lord Anophel Achthar (how with that title he came to be heir-apparent to a marquis, Peacock does not explain) is an exceeding poor creature, not much more valourous than Bob Acres, without any of Bob's redeeming fun, and as dull a dog as need or need not be.

One very curious feature in the book is the chess-dance, which has been sometimes carried out since in reality. It is one of not the least interesting points in Peacock's rather enigmatic character that he seems to have had a liking for pageants and shows, whether in themselves, or (in this particular instance) because of the example in his beloved Rabelais, or as fashions of old time—for there never was such a lover of old time

as this Liberal free-lance. His granddaughter tells us that he used to hold Lady-of-the-May revels in his old age for the children at Halliford, and the Aristophanic play in *Gryll Grange* partakes at least as much of this fancy as of the direct liking for theatrical performance proper which Peacock had, and which made him for some years a regular theatrical and operatic critic.

The songs of *Melincourt* are, considering its length, not numerous, and only one of them is, for Peacock, of the first class. Anthelia's first ballad, "The Tomb of Love", is not very much above the strains of the unhappy Della Crusca and his mates, whose bodies in her time still, to speak figuratively, lay scattered on the critic mountains cold, where they had been left by Gifford's tomahawk. Nor is her second, "The Flower of Love", much better. The terzetto, which immediately follows this, is not very strong, though "Hark, o'er the Silent Waters Stealing" is tolerable, and "The Morning of Love" is very fair imitation-Moore, and the Anti-Jacobin quintet very fair Hook. Of the two remaining serious pieces, "The Sun-Dial" is much better than "The Magic Bark". But the credit of the verse of this novel must rest upon "The Ghosts". It faces a page in which Southey is represented as saying of himself, "I knocked myself down to the highest bidder", and interrupts a discussion which, putting aside this childish injustice, Mr. Hippy most properly describes as "dry", so that it must have been a considerable relief at the time. The disputants, it is true, relapse; but probably few attended to them originally, and now, through most

of the rest of the novel, the reader catches himself humming at intervals,

Let the Ocean be Port, and we'll think it good sport  
To be laid in that Red Sea!

## THE MISFORTUNES OF ELPHIN AND RHODODAPHNE

*The Misfortunes of Elphin* occupies a curious position among Peacock's books. I myself prefer it to almost all of them, and I know some others who think with me; but it has been by no means a general favourite, though everyone, I think, has acknowledged the merit of the "War Song of Dinas Vawr". It is not difficult to account for this comparative want of popularity. The scenery and subject are remote; and the shortness of the book does not give the author time to make them familiar. The poetry is of a stamp at least as unfamiliar, and still more difficult to bring home to English readers; for high as Welsh poetry stands by consent even of those who do not invariably admire Celtic things, its whole scheme, imagery, language, and prosody appear to be even more difficult to transplant into English than the vague and doubtful fragments of Gaelic and the abundant and genuine stores of Irish.

But I should imagine that the chief stumbling-blocks have been, first, the pervading irony of the thing, and,

secondly, the additional offence of ironic treatment of a romantic subject. It must be added, too, that, with one exception, Peacock does not seem to have cared to exert that gift for slight but sufficient projection of character which he had discovered in *Nightmare Abbey*, had made still better use of in *Maid Marian*, and was to show almost throughout *Crotchet Castle*. Except Seithenyn the immortal, all the figures are but shadowy, and most of them are but the shadows of shades. Gwythno is simply an early Welsh René of Anjou; Elphin and Angharad, Taliesin and Melanghel, respectable and amiable nonentities; Maelgon, Rhûn, Melvas, bold bad men with a pleasantly incisive fashion of speech; Arthur and Gwenyvar (except at the moment when she slaps Gwenvach's face) cyphers.<sup>1</sup> It seems as if the author had relapsed upon the system of types rather than individualities.

<sup>1</sup> Although these introductions are not scholastic dissertations it may be permitted to point out that the Arthurian part of the story has a good deal of literary interest. The "Celticists" have in vain endeavoured (since they relinquished the treacherous help of persons like the late M. de la Villemarqué) to assign a *direct* Celtic origin to the best known and most poetical parts of the canonical Arthurian legend. In the escapade of Melvas, however, and the detention of Guinevere in the "Isle of Glass", critical charity, as well as partisan enthusiasm, has sometimes been inclined to see the origin of the "Melleagraunce" episodes of Malory and of the *Chevalier à la Charette* of Chrestien much earlier. The original authority for this experience of the Queen, who, as M. Paulin Paris demurely says, *était très sujette à être enlevée*, seems to be the Latin *Vita Gildae* attributed to Caradoc of Lancarvan, the contemporary of Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Yet after admitting this and making allowance for it, the book seems to me amply endowed with charm and interest. In the first place, it is here first that we see, full-blown and splendid, that extraordinary Peacockian style, the beginnings of which appear in *Nightmare Abbey*, and which, as has been noted, makes great advances, but does not attain to perfection, in *Maid Marian*. In the author's two first books this style, both in conversation and in narrative, is intermittently perceptible, if indeed it is perceptible at all. In both, Peacock writes sometimes quite ill; generally in a sufficient but not very remarkable manner; seldom very well. Here, after the successive progresses just referred to, his style is absolutely full-grown. As with all the best styles, it is not particularly easy to indicate with precision the exact *nuances* which make up its effect. It has something of Sallust, something of Tacitus, something of Lucian and something of Voltaire and his models and imitators. If anyone puts these together he will anticipate, and if he reads *Elphin* he will find, a peculiar sort of ironic antithesis in the clauses, and a crisp cadence in the whole sentence. That this may have been partly brought about by an attempt to render, and that it was very successful in rendering, the sententiousness of the Welsh manner is very probable; but it is noticeable, though not to the same extent, in *Maid Marian* and even in *Nightmare Abbey*, where there could have been no such influence or object. And it continued, softened a little from the tension here shown, to mark Peacock till the last. It is not a "snip-snap" style, and though it is full of epigram, the epigram is not fired off point-

blank at the reader with an obvious "There's one for you" from the writer. It slips easily off the pen, and is accompanied by the best Swiftian or Lucianic absence of insistence and waiting for applause. Further, the descriptive passages, already very good in *Maid Marian*, are even better here; and Peacock has nowhere excelled the departure from Seithenyn's castle and the picture of Caer Lleon. Indeed, I do not think it excessive to say that *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, taking it all round, is his best-written book.

It will, however, of course depend on how far the reader can enjoy the austerer kind of irony whether he will enjoy this writing or not, for it cannot be said that *The Misfortunes of Elphin* is a book by any means overflowing with the milk of human-kindness. Peacock's old attacks on the Lakers are indeed mostly dropped (though there is still a laureate who is a parasite and something worse, as in *Maid Marian*), and those on Lord Brougham have scarcely begun. The satire on humanity is more general than personal; but it is severe enough and very little relieved. The characters of the book who are virtuous are not interesting, and those who are interesting cannot by the farthest stretch of imagination or charity be called virtuous. Very sentimental or very rigidly moral persons can hardly be expected to be much in love with the delightful reprobate Seithenyn, who is the pillar and mainstay of the book. It is impossible to defend the conduct of this bibulous prince. He ought not to have neglected the embankment. He ought not, when remonstrated with on the subject, to have indulged in attempts to defend

his conduct which were flippant if they were not serious, and painfully sophistical if they were. When the catastrophe had come, his neglect not merely to attempt any atonement for it, but even to ascertain the fate of his daughter and his household, was reprehensible in the highest degree. Although the manners of the time may justify his acceptance of the position of King Ednyfed's butler, they do not excuse the levity with which he transfers his services to the slayer of his master and benefactor. Even the comparatively beneficent part which he plays in the latest scenes appears to have been dictated partly by the same levity and partly by self-interest; and his unblushing practice in and confession of habitual intoxication cannot but have blunted such very rudimentary principles of honour and honesty as his general conduct shows him to have originally possessed.

But if it is impossible for Propriety to defend Seithenyn, it is equally impossible for Taste and Sense not to regard him with prodigious admiration and affection. From his very first appearance, when he is quite (and the land of Gwaelod very nearly) half seas over, but still in state and dignity, to his very last, when he takes place under Sir Bedivere (but I do not think he followed his chief to Lyonesse), his magnificently apolaustic temperament displays itself in a series of *actes et paroles* equally magnificent. There is no bad blood in Seithenyn, though there may be a certain amount of selfishness; and difficult as it may be to arrange an exact Organon of his peculiar logic, he strikes me as being as good a reasoner as many logicians

and others who have attained very high repute in the world, as well as infinitely more amusing. He, quite as well as Friar Michael, might have been the mouthpiece of that famous formula as to "making a joke of things" which has been quoted in the general introduction to this series as expressing Peacock's most abiding conviction; and he is never false to his own principles. With what courtesy, combined with what topsy-turvyness of argument, does he defend the policy of "Can't you let it alone", against the arguments of Elphin and the blunter assertions of Teithrin at his first appearance! "It was half rotten when I was born, and that is a conclusive reason why it should be three parts rotten when I die", strikes us now (it is the fate of political reasoning) as a caricature not so much of Tory arguments of the kind, which have long ceased to be heard, as of "progressive" fallacies of another kind; but it is still beautiful. Although the proceeding of leaping into the sea with a drawn sword to stop a flood may not seem from the point of view of common sense and engineering entirely rational, it is heroic, it is logical (for this *was* "the enemy"), and it is warranted by the example of Marcus (not, as some say, Quintus) Curtius. And when, after many years, we meet Seithenyn again, how admirably true to himself is he! There is, perhaps, a little less of the absolute quaintness combined with dignity which previously distinguished him; a butler, even in the days when butlers were sometimes princes, could not be entirely the same in manner as a prince who was the head of an Embankment Commission. It was not necessary for years to bring Seithenyn the philosophic



mind, for he had always had it; but they had made his wisdom milder and mellower, while not impairing in the very least the marvellous topsy-turvyness of his logic. I still, after years of reading, have been unable, as I was unable ten years ago, to find anything in literature quite so beautiful as his demonstration that he is not dead; and though you may very frequently hear things not at all unlike it in life, that enhances instead of depreciating its value. I believe that he did kill two or three of the followers of King Melvas. There is no trace of cowardice in Seithenyn; a coward could not have been guilty, even in words, of the unblushing impudence of the parenthetical reference to King Elphin ("what he is king of you shall tell me at leisure"), considering that the speaker was responsible for the circumscription of Elphin's kingdom. A coward's impudence is never really humorous in this way. Parolles and Bessus and Bobadil we laugh at, not with. Pistol would not have said this; and though Falstaff might, no person of intelligence now takes Falstaff for a coward. And we should find reasons, if we had space to set them forth, for equal admiration of Seithenyn at Avallon and at Caer Lleon.

I do not remember to have seen it anywhere noticed in connection with the satire on the Tory and especially the Canningite position towards Reform in *Elphin*—satire which is of course chiefly to be found in Seithenyn's defence of the embankment—that it is of a very double-edged nature. The Radicals who were made sore by *Crotchet Castle* must have been rather hasty and short-sighted if they took unmixed delight in this its

forerunner by no long time, even though it did on the surface seem to make for them. The invading ocean is quite as susceptible of being taken as a text as the rotten embankment; and the whole tone and gust of the book are exceedingly unlike those of a fervent believer in progress of any kind, for all its gibes at kings and queens, at bishops and archbishops, at high-born hereditary commissioners, at war, at taxation, and so forth.

Something has been said above, though in little more than allusion, of the verse here, which stands of course by itself, being all either imitated or translated from actual Welsh originals. Nothing approaches the "Dinas Vawr" song, which has a diabolical lightness and swing about it quite unlike anything that is to be found elsewhere. It is probably the succinctest piece of humorous modern poetry in the world: there is not a line, not a word to spare. "The Circling of the Mead-horns" is a very good drinking song, but inferior, I think, to the less archaic performances of the other novels. The rest, as noted above, must be regarded rather as experiments in the introduction of Welsh poetry to English readers than as independent historical compositions. The best, I think, is Merlin's "Apple-trees"; but most suffer a little from that singular habit common to all nations in a state of imperfect development, but apparently commonest and lasting longest among Celts, of making verse a medium for things which would be much better said in prose.

Such things, however, can in no case interpose any serious obstacle in reading, because they can be skipped

without the slightest difficulty; and they may add an ornament and relish for some tastes. Indeed it is so certain that almost every reader according to his idiosyncrasy will either like *The Misfortunes of Elphin* extremely or be quite unable to get on with it, that details of this sort matter very little—much less than in any of the other books. The only thing to fear in the case of a book still so little read, is that its antique garb may serve to deter some readers who are fit readers from attempting it. Here the office of an introducer comes in with special appropriateness; and he may without officiousness give his assurance that not the most brand-new modern story in appearance can be freer from anything really out of date than *The Misfortunes of Elphin*. For irony of the true kind never faileth: and this is pure irony.

As the *Misfortunes* by themselves would have been hardly of bulk sufficient for a volume, it has been thought that it might not be disagreeable to readers to have Peacock's longest poem, a verse-novel itself, added to the now complete reissue of his prose novels. *Rhododaphne*, though it has not lacked fit admiration, has never been popular, but it is a very interesting example of that section of the Romantic poetry of the first quarter of this century which was written by men who were not, first of all, poets. In this section *Rhododaphne* takes very high rank. Peacock's scholarship (a point in which he was far superior to all his great poetical contemporaries, including even Coleridge, as far as exactness is concerned) may have a little "sicklied o'er" his strictly poetical vein; and his eighteenth-century

peculiarities also appear. But it is an immense advance on his only other long poem, *The Genius of the Thames*, published six years earlier, and we have little difficulty in seeing in it the great contagion of Shelley, in whose company, at Marlow, Peacock had just (1817) been living. The poem is exactly contemporary with *Nightmare Abbey*, which Shelley had in a very different way also inspired. It is pleasant to read the two together, and to observe how entirely the note of persiflage is kept out of the poem, how omnipresent it is in the novel. But this contrast is almost as well presented by the actual conjunction. It is, of course, only a very superficial criticism to which irony and sentiment seem incompatible. But their incompatibility is an inveterate popular error; and it cannot be quite useless to remind readers from time to time that no one is less unlikely than the author of a *Rhododaphne* to be the author also of a *Misfortunes of Elphin*.

## GRYLL GRANGE

*Gryll Grange*, the last and mellowest fruit from Peacock's tree, was, like most mellow fruit, not matured hastily. In saying this, I do not refer to the long period—exactly a generation in the conventional sense—which intervened between *Crotchet Castle* of 1831 and this of 1861. For we know as a matter of fact, from the preface to the 1856 edition of *Melincourt*, that Peacock was planning *Gryll Grange* at a time considerably nearer to, but still some years from, its actual publication.

There might perhaps have been room for fear lest such a proceeding, on the part of a man of seventy-five who was living in retirement, should result in an ill-digested mass of detail, tempered—or rather, distempered—by the grumbling of old age, and exhibiting the marks of failing powers. No anticipation could have been more happily falsified. The advance in good temper of *Gryll Grange*, even upon *Crotchet Castle* itself, is denied by no one. The book, though long for its author, is not in the least overloaded; and no sighs of failure have ever been detected in it, except by those who upbraid the still further severance between the line of Peacock's thought and the line of what is vulgarly accounted "progress", and who almost openly impute decay to powers no longer used on their side but against them. The only plausible pretext for this insinuation is that very advance in mildness and mellowness which has been noted—that comparative absence of the sharper and cruder strokes of the earlier work. But since the wit is as bright as ever, though less hard, it seems unreasonable to impute as a defect what, but for very obvious reasons, would be admitted as an improvement.

Except Brougham, who still comes in for some severe language, no one of Peacock's old favourite abominations undergoes personal chastisement. On the contrary, indirect but pretty distinct apology is tendered to Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge by appreciative citation of their work. Even among the general victims, Scotchmen and political economists have a still more direct olive-branch extended to them by the introduc-

tion of the personage of Mr. MacBorrowdale: there is no more blasphemy of Scott: and I do not at the present moment remember any very distinct slaps at paper money. Peace had been made long ago with the Church of England, through the powerful medium of Dr. Folliott; but it is ratified and cemented anew here not merely by the presentation of Dr. Opimian, but (in rather an odd fashion perhaps) by the trait of Falconer's devotion to St. Catherine. So also, as the fair hand of Lady Clarinda, despite some hard knocks administered to her father and brother, had beckoned Peacock away from his cut-and-dried satire of the aristocracy, so now Lord Curryfin exhibits a further stage of reconciliation. In short, all those elements of society to which very young men, not wanting either in brains or heart, often take crude and fanciful objection, had by this time approved themselves (as they always do, with the rarest exceptions, to *les âmes bien nées*) at worst graceful if unnecessary ornaments to life, at best valuable to the social fabric as solid and all but indispensable buttresses of it.

In all these "reconciliations and forgivenesses of injuries", however, it is very important to observe that there is no mawkishness; and, whatever may have been sometimes thought and said, there is no "ratting" in the real sense. As must be obvious to any attentive reader of the novels, and as has been pointed out once or twice before in these introductions, Peacock had at no time been anything like an enrolled, much less a convinced, member of the Radical or any party. He may have been a Republican in his youth, though for my part I should like more trustworthy evidence for it

than that of Thomas Jefferson Hogg, a very clever but a distinctly unscrupulous person. If he was—and it is not at all improbable that he had the Republican measles, a very common disease of youth, pretty early—he certainly had never been a democrat. Even his earlier satire is double-edged; and, as must be constantly repeated and remembered, it was always his taste and his endeavour to shoot folly as it flew, to attack existent and not extinct forms of popular or fashionable delusion. Such follies, whether in 1860 or since, have certainly not as a rule been of the aristocratic, monarchical, or Tory order generally.

He found plenty of these follies, however, in the other kind—the kind which he had begun to satirise smartly in *Crotchet Castle*—and he showed pretty decisively that his hand had not lost its cunning, nor his sword its sharpness. The satire, though partly, is not mainly political; and it is an interesting detail (though it only refreshes the memory of those who knew the facts then or have studied them since) that barely six years before a far more sweeping reform than that of 1832, a very acute judge who disliked and resisted it spoke of “another reform lunacy” as “not likely to arise in his time”. And these words, it must be remembered, are put in the mouth of Mr. MacBorrowdale, who is represented as merely middle-aged.

It is fortunate, however, for the interest of *Gryll Grange* that politics, in the strict sense, occupy so small a part of it; for of all subjects they lose interest first to all but a very select number of readers. The bulk of the satiric comment of the book is devoted either to purely

social matters or to the debateable land between these and politics proper. A little but not very much of this is obsolete or obsolescent. American slavery is no more; and the "Pantoprismatic Society" (in official language the Social Science Congress) has ceased to exist as a single recognised institution. But there is not much about slavery here, and if pantopragmatics have lost their special Society they flourish more than ever as a general and fashionable subject of human attention. You shall not open a number of *The Times* twice, perhaps not once, in a week, without finding columns of debate, harangue, or letter-writing purely pantoprismatical.

Still more is this the case with another subject which has even more attention, and on which what some think the central and golden sentence of the book is laid down by Dr. Opimian in the often-quoted words, "If all the nonsense which in the last quarter of a century [it is appalling to think that this quarter is getting on for three-quarters now] has been talked on all other subjects were thrown into one scale, and all that has been talked on the subject of Education alone were thrown into the other, I think the latter would preponderate". Indeed it cannot be said that after nearly five-and-thirty years, up to and including the present moment, during which Competitive Examination has been a field of battle, much has been added to Peacock's attack on it, or anything said on the other side to weaken the cogency of that attack. No doubt he was to some extent a prejudiced judge; for, though few people would at any time of his youth have had less to fear



from competitive examination, his own fortune had been made by the opposite system, and the competitive scheme must infallibly tend rather to exclude than to admit persons like him. But a wise criticism does not ask *cui bono* in cases of argument, it simply looks to see whether the advocacy is sound, not whether the advocate has received or expects his fee. And Peacock's advocacy is here not merely sound; it is, in so far as it goes, inexpugnable. It is true there is a still more irrefragable rejoinder to it which has kept competition safe hitherto, though for obvious reasons it will very rarely be found openly expressed by the defenders of the system; and that is, that, under the popular jealousy resulting from wide or universal suffrage, there is no alternative but competitive examination, or else the American system of alternating spoils to the victors, which is demonstrably worse for the public, and not demonstrably much better for private interests.

As for table-turning, and lectures, and the "excess of hurrying about", and "Siberian" dinners and so forth, they are certainly not dead. Table-turning may have changed its name; the others have not even adopted the well-known expedient of the *alias*, but appear just as they were thirty years ago in the social and satiric dictionaries of to-day.

It would be odd if this comparative freshness and actuality of subject did not make *Gryll Grange* one of the lightest and brightest of Peacock's novels; and I think it fully deserves that description. But it would be doing it extremely scant justice to allow anyone to suppose that its attractions consist solely, or even

mainly, in “valuable thoughts” and expressions of sense, satire, and scholarship (to combine Wordsworth with Warrington). In lighter respects, in respects of form and treatment of the kinds more usually associated with fiction, it need not hide its head with the best. Peacock gave himself more scope and verge in it than in any of his novels except *Melincourt*; and in *Melincourt* he had unfortunately not yet outgrown the habit of putting into the mouth of his characters long dissertations on special points. This he had now entirely left behind him; while he still possessed not merely the satiric power, but the improved and remarkable style, and the faculty if not of constructing plot yet of creating and presenting character, which have been noted in other places as his successive acquisitions. He has displayed all these here. The merely labelled oddities who still appear in *Crotchet Castle* in the persons of Mr. Philpot, Mr. Toogood, and others, are here entirely absent. The *convives* of Gryll Grange—the Squire, Dr. Opimian, Mr. Falconer, Lord Curryfin, Mr. Mac-Borrowdale, Miss Ilex, Morgana, Alice—are all real. As for the last, Niphetos is a beautiful rose, and the complexion which Peacock meant to indicate is the most beautiful of complexions, but I wish he had devised a prettier English surname than Niphet. I do not indeed love either of these young women quite so much as I love Lady Clarinda; but they and the more elderly spinster have enabled Peacock to give what he had never attempted before, a somewhat elaborate picture, or set of pictures, of love itself. These matters are the very apices of the code of taste; and it is very difficult to

get any two persons, even of those qualified (for of course the vulgar judgment is hopelessly "out" here), to agree on what is and is not successful treatment of them. The triple dangers of an old man's handling—over-lusciousness, defect of passion, and mawkish sentimentality—appear to me to be on the whole happily avoided. Of course if Peacock incurs the reproach of any of the three it is that of the last; and his eighteenth-century models and reminiscences may perhaps make him even here seem a very little namby-pamby to the nineteenth. But it must be a coarse taste, I think, which uses such a word with "Love and Age" presented to it; and though both the Allegro of Morgana and the Penseroso of Alice have something just a little theatrical about them, the touch is not excessive and the conversation of both is delightfully crisp and of all time.

Of course Falconer is rather an ass, and his clings to the society of the "vestals" somewhat imperfectly motivated; while the carrying off of the whole batch is something of a return to those strokes, not merely of the theatre, but of the farce-theatre, in which Peacock had indulged during the earlier part of his career. But the whole scheme of these novels is *ex hypothesi* whimsical or nothing; and I do not know that even this, which gives more coherence to the particular book than to most of the others, after all exceeds the limits of permitted whim. Falconer's rival, on the other hand, is extremely good. If there is any sign of "senility" it can only be in the fact that he is not better still, as without much difficulty he might have been. The elders are all satisfactory, though one might desiderate a little

more colour in Mr. Gryll, and though Dr. Opimian is almost too sweetly reasonable, too provokingly right in all points. The occasionally outrageous prejudice of Dr. Folliott had certainly more savour in it; though the earlier doctor's objections to Scott and to undraped statuary are entirely devoid of such justification as may be pleaded for the latter's strictures on Lord Tennyson and Sir John Millais. But he is wrong about halibut; and I do not think that a person of Dr. Opimian's tastes in 1860 could possibly have known so little of the story of St. Catherine. He must have been at either Oxford or Cambridge after the beginning of the Oxford Movement, and it is absolutely impossible that he should have been an Evangelical.

We must not dismiss without some special mention the episode—though it is not properly an episode, inasmuch as it has throughout an important connection with the working of the story—of “Aristophanes in London”. This has sometimes been adversely criticised as not sufficiently antique—which seems to overlook the obvious retort that if it had been more so it could not by any possibility have been sufficiently modern. Those who know something of Aristophanes and something of London may doubt whether it could have established the nexus much better. I have elsewhere pointed out the curious connection with Mansel's *Phrontisterion*, which was considerably earlier in date, and with the sentiments of which Peacock would have been in the heartiest agreement. But it is extremely unlikely that he ever saw it. His antipathy to the English universities appears to have been one of the most enduring of

his crazes, probably because it was always the most unreasonable; and though there is no active renewal of hostilities in this novel (or none of importance), it is noticeable there is also no direct or indirect palinode as there is in most other cases. As for the play itself, it seems to me very good. Miss Gryll must have looked delightful as Circe (we get a more distinct description of her personality here than anywhere else), Gryllus has an excellent standpoint, and the dialogue, though unequal, is quite admirable at the best. Indeed there is a Gilbertian tone about the whole piece which I should be rather more surprised at being the first to note, so far as I know, if I were not pretty well prepared to find that the study of the average dramatic critic is not much in Peacock. The choric trochees (which by the way is a tautology) are of the highest excellence, especially the piece beginning—

As before the pike will fly,

in which Cœur-de-Lion's discomfiture of the "septemvirate of quacks" is hymned; and the finale is quite Attic. I do not know whether the thing has ever been attempted as an actual show. Though rather exacting in its machinery, it ought to have been.

The novel is rather full of other verse, but except "Love and Age"—so often mentioned, but never to be mentioned enough for its strange and admirable commixture of sense and sentiment, of knowledge of the heart and knowledge of life—this is not of the first class for Peacock, certainly not worthy to be ranked with the play. "The Death of Philemon" is indeed a beautiful piece in its first half; the second were better "cut".

"The Dappled Palfrey", a very charming *fabliau* in the original, chiefly suggests the superiority of *Lochinvar*, to which it is a sort of counterpart and complement. "The New Order of Chivalry" with a good deal of truth has also a good deal of illiberality; and, amusing as it is, is a relapse into Peacock's old vein of almost insolent personality. Sir Moses Montefiore and Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy did not deserve, though they might afford to despise, the sort of cheap rallying here applied to them; and might have retaliated, not without point, on persons who drew large salaries at the India House, with frequent additional gratifications, and stood up for "chivalry" in their leisure moments. And "The Legend of St. Laura" is not first-rate. But the Italian translations make us wish for more of the same.

On the whole, however, though we may like some things more and some less here, I cannot conceive the whole being otherwise than delightful to any person of knowledge, sense, and taste. And as we close Peacock's novels there is this interesting though rather melancholy thought, that we "close the book" in more senses than one. They have never been imitated save afar off; and even the far-off imitations have not been very satisfactory. The English Muse seems to have set, at the joining of the old and new ages, this one person with the learning and tastes of the ancestors, with the irreverent criticism of the moderns, to comment on the transition; and, having fashioned him, to have broken the mould.

## DONNE'S POEMS

THERE is hardly any, perhaps indeed there is not any, English author on whom it is so hard to keep the just mixture of personal appreciation and critical measure as it is on John Donne. It is almost necessary that those who do not like him should not like him at all; should be scarcely able to see how any decent and intelligent human creature can like him. It is almost as necessary that those who do like him should either like him so much as to speak unadvisedly with their lips, or else curb and restrain the expression of their love for fear that it should seem on that side idolatry. But these are not the only dangers. Donne is eminently of that kind which lends itself to sham liking, to coterie worship, to a false enthusiasm; and here is another weapon in the hands of the infidels, and another stumbling-block for the feet of the true believers. Yet there is always something stimulating in a subject of this kind, and a sort of temptation to attempt it.

To write anything about Donne's life, after Walton, is an attempt which should make even hardened *écrivailleurs* and *écrivassiers* nervous. That the good Izaak knew his subject and its atmosphere thoroughly; that he wrote but a very few years after Donne's own death; and that he was a writer of distinct charm, are discouraging things, but not the most discouraging. It is perhaps only those who after being familiar for years

with Donne's poems, of which Walton says very little, make subsequent acquaintance with Walton's presentment of the man, who can appreciate the full awkwardness of the situation. It is the worst possible case of *pereant qui ante nos*. The human Donne whom Walton depicts is so exactly the poetical Donne whom we knew, that the effect is uncanny. Generally, or at least very frequently, we find the poet other than his form of verse: here we find him quite astoundingly akin to it.

The attempt, however, has to be made, and it shall be made with as little expenditure of art on matter as possible. John Donne, the son of a London merchant and a lady who was the daughter of John Heywood and of the house of Sir Thomas More, was born in or about the year 1573. It is thought, but not certainly known, that all his secular poetry, satiric and erotic, was written before the end of the century, and probably most of it before he was five-and-twenty. His education, both in secular and religious matters, appears to have been peculiar. His family were of the old faith, and it is said to have been for this reason that he took no degree at either Oxford or Cambridge, though he was a member of both Universities, entering Hart Hall at Oxford in his eleventh year, and, so Walton tells us, removing to Cambridge in his fourteenth. His father soon died, and he, inheriting no inconsiderable portion, was transferred to Lincoln's Inn, perhaps after an experience of foreign travel. Walton will have it that before he was twenty, he, having never actually professed the Romish faith, argued himself out of his tendency to it by study. But this is perhaps rather questionable. What is certain,



though vaguely certain, is that he was for some years a traveller and a man of pleasure, if not actually a soldier. He went with Essex to Cadiz in 1596, and visited the Azores, journeying also in Italy and in Spain. He is thought to have spent his fortune in these wanderings.

The institution of great men's households, which then prevailed, provided a kind of additional liberal profession for men of parts and gentle but not distinguished birth; and Donne, on his return to England, joined the household of Chancellor Sir Thomas Egerton, afterwards Lord Ellesmere. Here he met Anne More, Lady Egerton's niece and daughter of Sir George More, Lieutenant of the Tower. A clandestine marriage (1601) followed, with the result of great wrath on Sir George's part, the dismissal of Donne from Egerton's service, and his incarceration with his two friends, Samuel and Christopher Brooke (both poets, and the first afterwards Master of Trinity), who had helped his love-affairs. These troubles he won through, and at last was reunited to his wife with Sir George's blessing, but none of his money. So the pair had to take up their abode with a certain Francis Wolley of Pirford, at whose death, after a short residence at Peckham and Mitcham, Donne transferred his family to the house of Sir Robert Drury in London. He also accompanied Sir Robert on an embassy to France. It is this journey in reference to which a famous apparition story is told. There is no positive evidence to show why Donne, whose strong theological leanings must have been obvious to everybody, and who had, according to Walton, received in the middle of his troubles the offer

of a considerable preferment from Dean (afterwards Bishop) Morton, did not take orders earlier. But he told Morton that the irregularities of his early life prevented him, and the tenor both of his sacred and profane works makes it probable that this was a *vera causa*. Still there are other facts which show that he had not abandoned the hope of secular office, legal or other, until he reached middle life. At any rate it was not till 1615 that the express desire of the King (coupled with his sacred Majesty's equally express refusal, even at Somerset's desire, to make him anything else) induced him to take orders. James at once made him his chaplain, but for a time did not confer any benefice on him; and the heaviest calamity of his life, the death of his wife, to whom he was passionately attached, fell on him in 1617. But Lincoln's Inn made him its preacher (Cambridge had conferred the degree of D.D. on him two years earlier), and he again went on a diplomatic expedition, this time with Lord Hay to Germany. At last, in November 1621, he was made Dean of St. Paul's, and other preferments falling in, he became a comparatively rich man. But he held these offices not quite ten years, and died, after a long illness (in the course of which he had the strange but characteristic fancy of being painted in his shroud), on March 31, 1631. Broken health, the loss of his wife, the bitterness, to a man who must have known himself to be one of the greatest intellects of the age, of hopes delayed till long past middle life, and no doubt also sincere repentance for and reaction from youthful follies, will account for much of the almost unparalleled melancholy which appears in his later

works, and seems to have characterised his later life. But a considerable residue remains for natural idiosyncrasy, and for the influence of the Renaissance, the peculiar pessimism of which was perfectly different from that of classical times and from that of our own day, and can only be paralleled by the spirit of *Ecclesiastes*.

The circumstances of his life, however, do not greatly concern us here; nor does that part—an eminent and admirable part—of his work which is not in verse. But it does concern us that there is a strange, though by no means unexampled, division between the two periods of his life and the two classes of his work. Roughly speaking, almost the whole of at least the secular verse belongs to the first division of the life, almost the whole of the prose to the second. Again, by far the greater part of the verse is animated by what may be called as spiritualised worldliness and sensuality, the whole of the prose by a spiritualism which has left worldliness far behind. The conjunction is, I say, not unknown: it was specially prevalent in the age of Donne's birth and early life. It has even passed into something of a commonplace in reference to that Renaissance of which, as it slowly passed from south to north, Donne was one of the latest and yet one of the most perfect exponents. The strange story which Brantôme tells of Margaret of Navarre summoning a lover to the church under whose flags his mistress lay buried, and talking with him of her, shows, a generation before Donne's birth, the influence which in his day had made its way across the narrow seas as it had earlier across the Alps, and had at each crossing gathered gloom and force if it had lost

lightness and colour. Always in him are the two conflicting forces of intense enjoyment of the present and intense feeling of the contrast of that present with the future. He has at once the transcendentalism which saves sensuality and the passion which saves mysticism. Indeed the two currents run so full and strong in him, they clash and churn their waves so boisterously, that this is of itself sufficient to account for the obscurity, the extravagance, the undue quaintness which have been charged against him. He was "of the first order of poets"; but he was not of the first amongst the first. Only Dante perhaps among these greatest of all had such a conflict and ebullition of feeling to express. For, as far as we can judge, in Shakespeare, even in the *Sonnets*, the poetical power mastered to some extent at the very first the rough material of the poetic instinct, and prepared before expression the things to be expressed. In Dante we can trace something of the presence of slag and dross in the ore; and even in Dante we can perhaps trace faintly also the difficulty of smelting it. Donne, being a lesser poet than Dante, shows it everywhere. It is seldom that even for a few lines, seldomer that for a few stanzas, the power of the furnace is equal to the volumes of ore and fuel that are thrust into it. But the fire is always there—over-tasked, over-mastered for a time, but never choked or extinguished; and ever and anon from gaps in the smouldering mass there breaks forth such a sudden flow of pure molten metal, such a flower of incandescence, as not even in the very greatest poets of all can be ever surpassed or often rivalled.

For critical, and indeed for general purposes, the poetical works of Donne may be divided into three parts, separated from each other by a considerable difference of character and, in one case at least, of time. These are the *Satires*, which are beyond all doubt very early; the *Elegies* and other amatory poems, most of which are certainly, and all probably, early likewise; and the *Divine and Miscellaneous Poems*, some of which may not be late, but most of which certainly are. All three divisions have certain characteristics in common; but the best of these characteristics, and some which are not common to the three, belong to the second and third only.

It was the opinion of the late seventeenth and of the whole of the eighteenth century that Donne, though a clever man, had no ear. Chalmers, a very industrious student, and not such a bad critic, says so in so many words; Johnson undoubtedly thought so; Pope demonstrated his belief by his fresh "tagging" of the *Satires*. They all to some extent no doubt really believed what they said; their ears had fallen deaf to that particular concord. But they all also no doubt founded their belief to a certain extent on certain words of Dryden's which did not exactly import or comport what Mr. Pope and the rest took them to mean. Dryden had the knack, a knack of great value to a critic, but sometimes productive of sore misleading to a critic's readers—of adjusting his comments solely to one point of view, to a single scheme in metric and other things. Now, from the point of view of the scheme which both his authority and his example made popular, Donne *was* rather formless. But

nearly all the eighteenth-century critics and criticasters concentrated their attention on the *Satires*; and in the *Satires* Donne certainly takes singular liberties, no matter what scheme be preferred. It is now, I believe, pretty well admitted by all competent judges that the astonishing roughness of the satirists of the late sixteenth century was not due to any general ignoring of the principles of melodious English verse, but to a deliberate intention arising from the same sort of imperfect erudition which had in other ways so much effect on the men of the Renaissance generally. Satiric verse among the ancients allowed itself, and even went out of its way to take, licences which no poet in other styles would have dreamt of taking. The Horace of the impeccable odes writes such a hideous hexameter as—

Non ego, namque parabilem amo Venerem facilemque,

and one of the Roman satirists who was then very popular, Persius, though he could rise to splendid style on occasion, is habitually as harsh, as obscure, and as wooden as a Latin poet well can be. It is not probable, it is certain, that Donne and the rest imitated these licences of malice prepense.

But it must be remembered that at the time when they assumed this greater licence, the normal structure of English verse was anything but fixed. Horace had in his contemporaries, Persius and Juvenal had still more in their forerunners, examples of versification than which Mr. Pope himself could do nothing more "correct"; and their licences could therefore be kept within measure, and still be licentious enough to suit any pre-

conceived idea of the ungirt character of the Satiric Muse. In Donne's time the very precisians took a good deal of licence: the very Virgils and even Ovids were not apt to concern themselves very greatly about a short vowel before *s* with a consonant, or a trisyllable at the end of a pentameter. If therefore you meant to show that you were *sans gêne*, you had to make demonstrations of the most unequivocal character. Even with all this explanation and allowance it may still seem probable that Donne's *Satires* never received any formal preparation for the press, and are in the state of rough copy. Without this allowance, which the eighteenth century either did not care or did not know how to give, it is not surprising that they should have seemed mere monstrosities.

The satiric pieces in which these peculiarities are chiefly shown, which attracted the attention of Pope, and which, through his recension, became known to a much larger number of persons than the work of any other Elizabethan satirist, have the least share of Donne's poetical interest. But they display to the full his manly strength and shrewd sense, and they are especially noticeable in one point. They exhibit much less of that extravagant exaggeration of contemporary vice and folly which makes one of their chief contemporaries, Marston's *Scourge of Villainy*, almost an absurd thing, while it is by no means absent from Hall's *Virgidemiarum*. We cannot indeed suppose that Donne's satire was wholly and entirely sincere, but a good deal in it clearly was. Thus his handling of the perennial subjects of satire is far more fresh, serious, and direct

than is usual with satirists, and it was no doubt this judicious and direct quality which commended it to Pope. Moreover, these poems abound in fine touches. The Captain in the first Satire—

Bright parcel-gilt with forty dead men's pay—

the ingenious evildoers in the second—

for whose sinful sake,  
Schoolmen new tenements in hell must make—

the charming touch at once so literary and so natural in the fifth—

so controverted lands  
'Scape, like Angelica, the striver's hands,

are only a few of the jewels five words long that might be produced as specimens. But it is not here that we find the true Donne: it was not this province of the universal monarchy of wit that he ruled with the most unshackled sway. The provinces that he did so rule were quite other: strange frontier regions, uttermost isles where sensuality, philosophy, and devotion meet, or where separately dwelling they rejoice or mourn over the conquests of each other. I am not so sure of the *Progress of the Soul* as some writers have been—interesting as it is, and curious as is the comparison with Prior's *Alma*, which it of necessity suggests, and probably suggested. As a whole, it seems to me uncertain in aim, unaccomplished in execution. But what things there are in it! What a line is—

Great Destiny, the Commissary of God!



What a lift and sweep in the fifth stanza—

To my six lustres almost now outwore!

What a thought that—

This soul, to whom Luther and Mahomet were  
Prisons of flesh!

And the same miraculous pregnancy of thought and expression runs through the whole, even though it seems never to have found full and complete delivery in artistic form. How far this curious piece is connected with the still more famous *Anniversaries*, in which so different a stage of "progress" is reached, and which ostensibly connect themselves with the life and death of Mrs. Elizabeth Drury, is a question which it would be tedious to argue out in any case, and impossible to argue out here. But the successive stages of the *Anatomy of the World* present us with the most marvellous poetical exposition of a certain kind of devotional thought yet given. It is indeed possible that the union of the sensual, intellectual, poetical, and religious temperaments is not so very rare; but it is very rarely voiceful. That it existed in Donne's pre-eminently, and that it found voice in him as it never has done before or since, no one who knows his life and works can doubt. That the greatest of this singular group of poems is the *Second Anniversary* will hardly, I think, be contested. Here is the famous passage—

Her pure and eloquent blood  
Spoke in her cheeks and so distinctly wrought,  
That one might almost say her body thought—

which has been constantly quoted, praised, and imitated. Here, earlier, is what I should choose if I undertook the perilous task of singling out the finest line in English sacred poetry—

So long  
As till God's great *Venite* change the song—

a *Dies Irae* and a *Venite* itself combined in ten English syllables.

Here is that most vivid and original of Donne's many prose and verse meditations on death, as—

A groom  
That brings a taper to the outward room.

Here too is the singular undernote of "she" repeated constantly in different places of the verse, with the effect of a sort of musical accompaniment or refrain, which Dryden (a great student of Donne) afterwards imitated on the note "you" in *Astraea Redux* and the *Coronation*. But these, and many other separate verbal or musical beauties, perhaps yield to the wonder of the strange, dreamy atmosphere of moonlight thought and feeling which is shed over the whole piece. Nowhere is Donne, one of the most full-blooded and yet one of the least earthly of English poets, quite so unearthly.

The *Elegies*, perhaps better known than any of his poems, contain the least of this unearthliness. The famous *Refusal* "to allow his young wife to accompany him as his page", though a very charming poem, is, I think, one of the few pieces of his which have been praised enough, if not even a little overpraised. As a matter of taste, it seems to me indeed more open to

exception than the equally famous and much "fie-fied" *To his Mistress going to Bed*, a piece of frank naturalism redeemed from coarseness by passion and poetic completeness. The *Elegies* again are the most varied of the divisions of Donne's works, and contain next to the *Satires* his liveliest touches, such as—

The grim, eight-foot-high, iron-bound, serving-man,  
That oft names God in oaths, and only than [*i.e.* then]—

or as the stroke—

Lank as an unthrift's purse.

In *Epithalamia* Donne was good, but not consummate, falling far short of his master, Spenser, in this branch. No part of his work was more famous in his own day than his *Epistles*, which are headed by *The Storm* and *The Calm*, that so did please Ben Jonson. But in these and other pieces of the same division, the misplaced ingenuity which is the staple of the general indictment against Donne, appears, to my taste, less excusably than anywhere else. Great passion of love, of grief, of philosophic meditation, of religious awe, had the power to master the fantastic hippogriff of Donne's imagination, and make it wholly serviceable; but in his less intense works it was rather unmanageable. Yet there are very fine things here also; especially in the *Epistle* to Sir Henry Goodyere, and those to Lucy Countess of Bedford and Elizabeth Countess of Huntingdon. The best of the *Funeral Elegies* are those<sup>1</sup> on

<sup>1</sup> [On the authorship, see Grierson, *Donne's Poetical Works*, 1912, vol. ii. p. cxliii ff.]

Mrs. Boulstred. In the *Divine Poems* there is nothing so really divine as the astonishing verse from the *Second Anniversary* quoted above. It must always, however, seem odd that such a poet as Donne should have taken the trouble to tag the *Lamentations* of Jeremiah into verse, which is sometimes much more lamentable in form than even in matter. The epigram as to Le Franc de Pompignan's French version, and its connection, by dint of Jeremiah's prophetic power, with the fact of his having lamented, might almost, if any Englishman had had the wit to think of it, have been applied a century earlier to parts of this of Donne. *The Litany* is far better, though it naturally suggests Herrick's masterpiece in divine song-writing; and even the *Jeremiah* ought not perhaps to be indiscriminately disapproved. The opening stanzas especially have a fine melancholy clang not unknown, I think, as a model to Mr. Swinburne.

But to my fancy no division of Donne's poems—the *Second Anniversary* always excepted—shows him in his quiddity and essence as do the Lyrics. Some of these are to a certain extent doubtful. One of the very finest of the whole, "Absence, hear thou my protestation",<sup>1</sup> with its unapproached fourth stanza, appeared first in Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody* unsigned. But all the best authorities agree (and for my part I would almost go to the stake on it) that the piece is Donne's. In those which are undoubtedly genuine the peculiar quality of Donne flames through and perfumes the dusky air which is his native atmosphere in a way which, though I do not

<sup>1</sup> [On the authorship, see Grierson, *id.* vol. ii. p. cli. and vol. i. p. 428 ("probably by John Hoskins").]

suppose that the French poet had ever heard of Donne, has always seemed to me the true antitype and fulfilment by anticipation of Baudelaire's

Encensoir oublié qui fume  
En silence à travers la nuit.

Everybody knows the

Bracelet of bright hair about the bone  
of the late discovered skeleton, identifying the lover:  
everybody the perfect fancy and phrase of the exordium—

I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,  
Who died before the god of Love was born.

But similar touches are almost everywhere. The enshrining once for all in the simplest words of a universal thought—

I wonder by my troth what thou and I  
Did till we loved?

The selection of single adjectives to do the duty of a whole train of surplusage—

Where can we find two better hemispheres  
Without *sharp* north, without *declining* west?—

meet us, and tell us what we have to expect in all but the earliest. In comparison with these things, such a poem as "Go and catch a falling star", delightful as it is, is perhaps only a delightful quaintness, and *The Indifferent* only a pleasant quip consummately turned. In these perversities Donne is but playing *tours de force*. His natural and genuine work reappears in such poems

as *Canonization* or as *The Legacy*. It is the fashion sometimes, and that not always with the worst critics, to dismiss this kind of heroic rapture as an agreeable but conscious exaggeration, partly betrayed and partly condoned by flouting-pieces like those just mentioned. The gloss does not do the critic's knowledge of human nature or his honesty in acknowledging his knowledge much credit. Both moods and both expressions are true; but the rapture is the truer. No one who sees in these mere literary or fashionable exercises, can ever appreciate such an *aubade* as "Stay, O Sweet, and do not rise", or such a midnight piece as *The Dream*, with its never-to-be-forgotten couplet—

I must confess, it could not choose but be  
Profane to think thee anything but thee.

If there is less quintessence in *The Message*, for all its beauty, it is only because no one can stay long at the point of rapture which characterises Donne at his most characteristic, and the relaxation is natural—as natural as is the pretty fancy about St. Lucy—

Who but seven hours herself unmask—

the day under her invocation being in the depths of December. But the passionate mood, or that of mystical reflection, soon returns, and in the one Donne shall sing with another of the wondrous phrases where simplicity and perfection meet—

So to engraft our hands as yet  
Was all our means to make us one,  
And pictures in our eyes to get  
Was all our propagation,

or in the other dwell on the hope of buried lovers—

To make their souls at the last busy day,  
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay.

I am not without some apprehension that I shall be judged to have fallen a victim to my own distinction, drawn at the beginning of this paper, and shown myself an unreasonable lover of this astonishing poet. Yet I think I could make good my appeal in any competent critical court. For in Donne's case the yea-nay fashion of censorship which is necessary and desirable in the case of others is quite superfluous. His faults are so gross, so open, so palpable, that they hardly require the usual amount of critical comment and condemnation. But this very peculiarity of theirs constantly obscures his beauties, even to not unfit readers. They open him; they are shocked, or bored, or irritated, or puzzled by his occasional nastiness (for he is now and then simply and inexcusably nasty), his frequent involution and eccentricity, his not quite rare indulgence in extravagances which go near to silliness; and so they lose the extraordinary beauties which lie beyond or among these faults. It is true that, as was said above, there are those, and many of them, who can never and will never like Donne. No one who thinks *Don Quixote* a merely funny book, no one who sees in Aristophanes a dirty-minded fellow with a knack of Greek versification, no one who thinks it impossible not to wish that Shakespeare had not written the *Sonnets*, no one who wonders what on earth Giordano Bruno meant by *Gli eroici Furori*, need trouble himself even to attempt to like Donne. "He will

never *have done* with that attempt'', as our Dean himself would have unblushingly observed, for he was never weary of punning on his name.

But for those who have experienced, or who at least understand, the ups-and-downs, the ins-and-outs of human temperament, the alternations not merely of passion and satiety, but of passion and laughter, of passion and melancholy reflection, of passion earthly enough and spiritual rapture almost heavenly, there is no poet and hardly any writer like Donne. They may even be tempted to see, in the strangely mixed and flawed character of his style, an index and reflection of the variety and the rapid changes of his thought and feeling. To the praise of the highest poetical art he cannot indeed lay claim. He is of course entitled to the benefit of the pleas that it is uncertain whether he ever prepared definitely for the press a single poetical work of his; that it is certain that his age regarded his youth with too much disapproval to bestow any critical care on his youthful poems. But it may be retorted that no one with the finest sense of poetry as an art could have left things so formless as he has left, that it would have been intolerable pain and grief to any such till he had got them, even in MS., into shape. The retort is valid. But if Donne cannot receive the praise due to the accomplished poetical artist, he has that, not perhaps higher but certainly rarer, of the inspired poetical creator. No study could have bettered—I hardly know whether any study could have produced—such touches as the best of those which have been quoted, and as many which perforce have been left out. And no study



could have given him the idiosyncrasy which he has. *Nos passions*, says Bossuet, *ont quelque chose d'infini*. To express infinity no doubt is a contradiction in terms. But no poet has gone nearer to the hinting and adumbration of this infinite quality of passion, and of the relapses and reactions from passions, than the author of *The Second Anniversary* and *The Dream*, of *The Relique* and *The Ecstasy*.

1896

## SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY LYRICS

SOME experience in compiling selections has taught me that it is scarcely possible, so far as the reader is concerned, to take too little trouble in explaining the method on which they are compiled. I shall only say as briefly as possible that I have construed the term "Seventeenth Century" liberally, but not, I hope, too liberally, by extending the *terminus a quo* a little into the sixteenth. The death of Dryden, the last singer for many years who really sang in anything but comic vein, coincides so exactly with the century's close that no trespass there was necessary, or possible. For the rest, I have seldom considered the familiarity, and never the strangeness, of the pieces I have chosen; that is to say, I have seldom been deterred from giving a place to anything that I thought superlatively good because it was already well known, and I have never allowed mere novelty of discovery to make up for the want of intrinsic goodness. Much, if not most, of what is found here will be familiar; but the selection is, I think, more varied and richer than any previous one on a similar scale and plan. The word "lyric" I have construed largely, not refusing it even to pieces in decasyllabic verse, which were notoriously intended, or which are obviously suitable, to be sung rather than said. And if I have had any other guiding motive it has been to please myself; for in this case, at any rate—though to please oneself may not be

a certain way of pleasing others—there is no second way which is more certain. To attempt to suit all tastes is pretty certainly to succeed in misfitting most. By pleasing yourself you can at least be sure that there is one person satisfied—an argument which I do not lay down as universally applicable in questions of conduct, but only as probably reasonable in the making of literary selections such as this. It can never be more convenient than in attempting to assemble, in a small space, if not the essence, at least some sufficient and characteristic samples, of so great a matter as the lyrical production of the English poets in the time which passed from the death of Spenser to that of Dryden. For this time was, with the exception, and perhaps hardly with the exception, of another hundred years which are just [1893] closing, the most fertile period of anything like the same length in the literary history of England, and not inferior in quantity and quality of lyrical produce to any century in any other history. The exquisite contents of the Greek lyric anthology, even construing the word “lyric” in the most generous way, are scattered over some thousand years: to make a really great collection of lyrics in Latin we must stride even more seven-leaguedly, and include medieval hymns. The Scotch and Spanish lyres mostly give us folk-songs, delightful but hard to fix to any date. To get together any such collection as is here given in French, we must draw on every age from the twelfth century to the nineteenth. But in this seventeenth century of ours England was a mere nest of singing birds, a nightingale’s haunt in a centennial May.

It is rather a temptation to the abstract critic to

inquire why it was that lyric properly so called was later than the other kinds in our Renaissance. That it was so is certain, and the fact, or a very little more than the fact, must suffice us here. It is not wholly improbable that the strong revulsion of the first generation of Elizabethan poets of the best class from the old doggerel measures may have had something to do with it, but it is certain that the song proper, despite the passion of the age for music, was a little behind the drama, and considerably behind (I am taking the dates of perfection) the sonnet and the epic. Perhaps the retardation, slight as it was, helped the lyric impulse while it was finding way to gather the astounding volume and force which characterise it. The charming volumes in which Mr. A. H. Bullen has collected the lyrics of the Elizabethan song-books, romances, dramas, and what not, revealed for the first time to many what only a few knew before. But even a smattering of English letters must have informed anyone who cared to let his brain work on the substance of his reading that the lyric gift grew in England from 1580, at least till 1660, with no small after-growths in Dryden, Sedley, and others, after a fashion hardly elsewhere to be paralleled. In the writers of this time we find one phenomenon recurring in the most unmistakable manner—the presence in men apparently of quite the second, third, or even a lower rank of literature, of an evidently natural gift which the very greatest men of another generation cannot reach though they seek it never so carefully. No competent judge, taking all things into consideration, would dream of setting such men as Campion, Carew, Herrick, Love-

lace, and others on a par, as men of general literary faculty, with Swift, Pope, Thomson, even Gray. Yet the first batch, and even contemporaries of theirs much inferior to them, achieved lyrical effects which the latter cannot touch, cannot even approach unto, which never appear again until they are heard stammeringly in Cowper and fitfully in Coleridge. Take (and the comparison is crucial, for the Titanic craftsmanship of each was accompanied by greater learning in the one, and by a defter faculty of adjustment to the particular conditions in the other) Jonson and Dryden. Dryden's lyrics proper are, to my fancy, much undervalued, one main reason being that they lie chiefly in his plays, which nobody reads; and they are frequently charming. But where will you find in Dryden the exquisite touch of "Drink to Me only with thine Eyes", of "Queen and Huntress", of "Underneath this sable Hearse"? You will no more find it than you will find in Jonson the flawless sweep of decasyllabic couplet, which in themes congenial enough of themselves to Ben drives home the argument in *Religio Laici*, makes history (and partisan-history) poetry in *Absalom and Achitophel*, and causes an ever-burning bush of "singing flame" to burgeon round Shadwell and Settle, Ferguson and Shaftesbury.

It is with the earlier and more fortunate period that we have mainly to busy ourselves. Besides the apparently (and only apparently) unphilosophical remarks that this lyrical spirit was here, that it broke out in the most unlikely places, and that in other and likely places we may seek for it in vain, there is really not much to say on the matter, in the way of assigning cause and effect,

of examining whys and wherefores. Who has a more apparently lyrical imagination than John Ford? He has not left a single good lyric, and is probably responsible for some very bad ones. Who has a more elaborate and evidently conscientious theory of verse, which would, if carried out, make real English lyric impossible, than Thomas Campion? He has left us good store of work second only to the greatest efforts of the greatest masters. Who shall break into that incomparable and superhuman music, both sacred and profane, of "I dare not ask a Kiss", of *The Litany*, of the lines *To Perilla*?—a decidedly reprobate parson, a rather vulgar-souled man in some ways, a foul-mouthed and foul-minded lampooner, a Philistine who would sooner have the *fumum et opes strepitumque* of Fleet Street than the loveliest country in England. Who shall soar into the Uranian passion of the *St. Theresa* lines, and flutter in the playful grace of "Whoe'er she be"?—a timid, self-centred Cambridge don, with hardly a thought outside his prayer-book and his college round of duties. Who shall accomplish the gorgeous eloquence of

When thou, poor excommunicate,

the dewy freshness of

Read in these roses the sad story?

—a fribble, a courtier, a debauchee, and if we may believe it, a man who wrote with difficulty and without inspiration.

There is no explanation of these things, or rather, the explanations fail to be explanatory to such an extent

that, except as sets-off to critical conversation, we need not trouble ourselves about them. A few other matters properly within the purview of the critic and editor may demand a word or two. Although I cannot go the whole way with some critics who have thought that anapaestic and dactylic rhythm was unknown during this period (an opinion which, I am sure, they would have been as much delighted as I was to see changed by an anonymous writer into the dictum that "rhymed anapaests are not suited to the genius of our language"), it is certain that the great majority of the lyrists of this essentially lyrical age content themselves with the iamb and the trochee. And the secret, at least the metrical secret, of their success is the extraordinary effect which they get out of the soaring power of the one and the liquid lapse of the other measure. Their iambs, nearly the last beat of which is heard in Sedley's famous lines—

Love still has something of the sea  
From which his mother rose,

have the tower of the Theban eagle; their trochees, as in many an example of Ben and of the tribe of Ben, or in the "King Pandion he is dead" of the *Passionate Pilgrim*, drip like honey from the rock. Even the magnificent imagination of Donne, the passion of Lovelace and Crashaw, the miraculous art of Carew, the dawn-lights of Herrick, depend to a great extent upon the command of these two staple measures—a command which has been rather imitated than recovered since, and which is so marked and so unmistakable that it has acquired the name of "the seventeenth-century touch", and is so

spoken of whenever it is met in other men and other times.

Another point which may be worth making about this delightful vision of English literature is, that its effects, as far as thought and phrase, separated from metre, are concerned, are achieved partly by extreme simplicity, partly by excessive remoteness. Both are well-known means of arriving at that "making of the common as though it were not common", which is perhaps the best, and is certainly the most compendious definition of poetry. The simplicity-way is the most difficult, but the most effective; and it has never been applied with more success than by Shakespeare and the best of his followers in one way, by Jonson and the best of his followers in another. This is indeed the great glory of the period. Its greatest notoriety, as distinguished from its greatest glory, is derived from its exercises in the other extreme,—from those so-called "metaphysical" eccentricities in language or in conceit which have been so often, if not always so justly, blamed, which have met with perhaps even more ridicule than blame, which certainly at their worst are ridiculous enough, and which yet at their best add a strange delight to the enjoyment of poetry. Of these things Donne is the unquestioned king; all others are but at best his well-willing subjects, at worst his clumsy courtiers and the imitators of his defects. It may be further observed that these conceits are nowhere so tolerable as in lyric. They are impertinent in narrative; they, to say the least, do not add to the verisimilitude of dramatic conversation; but within the short compass of a lyric they give, if happily handled,



interest and flavour to the verse, and are capable of being accompanied and commented by the music in an unusual degree.<sup>1</sup>

As to the themes of the verse here collected, the chief of them is the theme of nine-tenths, of ninety-nine-hundredths, of the lyrical poetry of the world. There are others, no doubt, and of some of them we shall find famous and admirable examples. But if it be not true that the lyre *ἔρωτα μόνον ἤχει*, it sounds that passion so much more willingly, so much more happily than any other, that there can be no comparison of the results in volume or in merit. There are now—there always have been—plenty of denouncers of vain and amatorious poems; but few of them have the excuse of the author of the phrase, that he could write as well as the amorists on themes other than erotic. In nine cases out of ten the impulse which makes a man spontaneously lyrical is the impulse of passion; in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the subject to which a man turns who not quite so spontaneously seeks a subject, is the same. But no age has ever been so happy in the love-lyric as this which we are studying, or so various in its fashion of treating it. Whether the poet lean to Venus Pandemos with Carew, or to Venus Urania with Crashaw; whether he be whimsical with Suckling, heroically and simply passionate with Montrose and Lovelace, literary with Ben, half sensual, half spiritual, with Donne, almost

<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes thought bad manners to refer to one's own work; I hold it worse to repeat what has been elsewhere said. And I must therefore refer anyone who wishes to see more on this "metaphysical" subject to my *History of Elizabethan Literature*, chap. x.

wholly sensual, and yet not morbid, with Herrick, he seldom at his best misses those transporting touches which immortalise the commonplace needs of humanity, its usual pleasures, its weaknesses from the point of view of the philosopher; which half excuse its relapses into folly and sin from the point of view of the ascetic. There will be found here amply sufficient matter to vindicate this from being a book of mere love-songs; but the mere love-songs will, I think, be found to be as much the best and the most immortal part of it as the emotions which they celebrate are, when all is said and done, the best things and the most immortal of life itself.

Of the other chief themes of lyric, two—wine and war—are not extensively represented in our matter, though the latter has one inimitable and hardly surpassed example in Drayton's *Ballad of Agincourt*. The drinking-song is, for what reason I hardly know, seeing that we have until lately had the repute of being no ill hands at drinking, not very well represented at any time in English till the late and rather literary than spontaneous era of Moore and Peacock. One noble song, indeed, the immortal

Back and side go bare, go bare,

which for the credit of the Church I hope Bishop Still did write, is much earlier than even a generous construction of our time can admit. Some bacchanals of Alexander Brome's in the full middle of it have merit. But for the most part Venus engaged the singers, to the neglect of both her principal lovers. The political verse of the time finds a better place in another volume of this

series, exclusively devoted to its class; for political verse, though by no means a bastard kind, is one which keeps strictly to itself. Nor shall we find very much of the various kinds of comic or social verse, which belong in their perfection to a further advanced and less simple state of manners and feelings. Such verse, at any rate in the best time of our period, has for the most part a somewhat unintentional comedy if it is playful merely, being "metaphysical" in the dangerous way, and is brutally horse-playful if it is intended for downright satire. The epigrams of Ben and his tribe are often lyrical in form, but Heaven forbid that anyone should admit some of them to such a banquet of the Muses as I hope this will be. On the other hand, the epitaph attained at this time, as is well known, to a perfection never afterwards rivalled in English, except once or twice by Landor, and never before even approached. Religious verse is in the same condition. Only Miss Christina Rossetti has since come near the union of real poetry and real religion which characterises Crashaw and Vaughan, Herrick and Donne. And the time is not much less successful in the serious verse—moral or properly metaphysical—which comes closest to the religious division. Though the sense of the picturesque was not supposed to be born, it is admirable in its description of country life and joys. But somehow or other it brings most of these things round to the one great theme—the central, the absorbing—of love,—love happy or unhappy, physical or metaphysical, but always Love.

In the following pages, though there is a certain

regular chronological progress, I have not adopted but have designedly disregarded exact chronological order, and have expressly eschewed putting all the selections from the same author together. If there is any drawback to this (and I really do not know what it is, as the index of authors with their dates must prevent any real confusion), it is, I think, more than compensated by the wild civility of the mixture of subjects and styles. I have avoided pieces of very great length, and this avoidance as well as its mainly political character has excluded one poem which I should like to have given—Marvell's *Horatian Ode*. Poems which could not be given without omissions have been eschewed; or perhaps I might say that I have found no difficulty in giving the whole of almost everything that I wished to give. No sonnets will be found here, for they seem to me, for all their beauty, among the least lyrical—that is to say, *singable* to music—of any poetic forms. Nor is there anything from Shakespeare or from Milton; for the stars look best when both sun and moon are away.

## LORD DERBY'S TRANSLATION OF THE *ILIAD*

LORD DERBY published [his translation of] the first book [of the *Iliad*] privately and experimentally in 1862, and, this pilot balloon having been successful, the whole in 1864. We hear from Lord Malmesbury of his "amusing himself with translating the *Iliad*" as early as 1853, in one of his fits of gout, and at a later period as "very busy with his *Iliad*". It had a great success at first; much more, I think, than, in the case of such a book, the mere circumstance of its being the work of an ex-Prime Minister would have given it, even with a people so fantastic in their book-buyings as the English. The author was able to thank the public and his critics in a fifth edition within seven months after the appearance of the first (in October 1864), in May 1865. Then the demand slackened, though he lived to issue, in 1867, yet another and more portable edition, with the smaller translations added to it. In later years it has, I think, been rather unjustly depreciated by Homeric scholars. *On Translating Homer* has, as Homer's second if not his greatest hero says of himself in a modern mouth, "become a name". It is a thing for discussion, for partisanship almost. We have in criticism Wilson's opinion on it, Mr. Arnold's, Mr. Lang's—to mention only considerable ones published at some distance of

time. We have endless practical attempts on the great scale and the small. In such cases the vision of the wood may be not a little hindered by the trees; and each man's exploration of it is likely to be something more than a little hindered by his quest for particular trees.

What is it that we want in Homer? What do we desire to see reproduced in an English version of him? I think critics of the subject have sometimes manifested a certain disinclination to be pinned down to this question, and have rather willingly indulged in alarums and excursions on particular points which, save as contributing to a general view, have not much to do with the case.

There is in Homer, first of all, the story, which even the baldest translation will give us, and which can, perhaps, be given best, not by translation at all, but by such tales from Homer as Lamb's. Still, unless the translation is so disgustingly bad that it simply does not let itself be read, it can hardly fail to give this story, and it cannot, even if it is *la plus belle fille du monde* among translations, from this point of view, give any more. Secondly, there are the lights on manners, customs, and the like, together with the illustration of the temper of the early world. Here we get considerably higher. For a translation to render these, the translator must have a pretty considerable knowledge, not merely of the bare language, but of the literature of which the work forms part. It was here that Pope, whom sheer literary talent carried safe through, to some extent, failed grievously, his almost entire ignorance of Greek and his scant knowledge of things Greek constantly weakening his version. Thirdly, there is the value of the language, the

metre, the rhythm, and the like; and at this stage we plunge at once from mere knee-deep water over head and ears. Hardly deeper is the fourth depth—that of making the new work a poem, if not of the same poetic force as the original, yet a poem. For in truth it is only a continuation of the third: and if anyone can swim easily in that, it will go hard but he will not find himself in danger of sinking in the other. It is this third degree over which there is all the difficulty and all the pother, and it will be found on examination that most of the faults with which Lord Derby's version is charged arise from an erroneous, or at least unreasonable, estimate of what has to be done in this direction and of the way of doing it. In other words, he has been asked to give not only something which he did not intend to give, but something which he was not bound to give.

As he himself observes in his preface, which is brief, modest, and critically very sound, the varieties of devices adopted to satisfy the third requirement (not that he formulates or regards it as such) have been almost innumerable. And I do not know that much can be said against his argument for blank verse. But I think it escaped him that the strongest part of that argument is, so to speak, negative. For myself, I used in green, unknowing youth to have an idea that the Spenserian stanza might do; I have long given that up. I still think Chapman the best version we have, but that is for another reason, presently to be noted. The fact is that the more constrained, though also more characteristic, metres, from the couplet to the Spenserian or the "pestilent heresy" of English hexameters, do not render

and cannot render the effect which the Homeric hexameter gives to the reader of the Greek, but can and do render, to his ears jarringly and to the ears of others misleadingly, something which is not the effect of Homer. And the same is the case with archaisms or affectations of language, whether they be of the less extravagant style, as that of the ballad metre and dialect, or the more extravagant, such as is well known in some versions later in date than Lord Derby's. You never can reproduce of malice prepense and by mannerism an effect which was simply and naturally produced. If Chapman is still the best thing we have, and if, as I believe, Chaucer could have done it better than Chapman, and a French *trouvère* of the twelfth century best of all, it is partly, no doubt, because the spirit of these men and of their times was more akin to Homer's than ours. But it is partly also because their own style, language, and spirit have undergone since they wrote, though in a less degree, the very process of ageing, of moving aloof, of which we feel the presence in Homer. No *pastiche* nowadays, whether in prose or in verse, can produce this effect; it can only produce a *pastiche* of it.

At the same time, doubtless, according to the taste of his own time, and still more of the times which have succeeded his, Lord Derby sacrificed much by adopting plain blank verse, and a simple though stately strain of literary English. It may be that he was right, and that our tastes are wrong. Few critics have, I think, noticed how thoroughly and hopelessly the mere appreciation of simplicity has gone out in England. We have become rather more sensitive to positive ugliness, to dull, clumsy



want of beauty, than our fathers were; but we have rushed into the belief that beauty must be florid and brilliant or quaint and odd, that it cannot be classical and quiet. Lord Derby's style has very little ornament, and unluckily such ornament as he has is now an unfashionable—was never at any time a very good—kind. He draws 'near to, though he never reaches, the worst features of the poetic diction of the last century, the artificial lingo which Dryden seldom or never permitted himself, but which reigned supreme, save in a few eccentrics, between Dryden and Darwin. It is here that the real danger of his version lies, and I do not say that it altogether escapes that danger. But I think it would be well for those who despise it to remember, more clearly than they seem to do, that literary history is the merest Bluebeard's closet full of dead loves. Of course, we think our live love prettier. Will she seem so to those who open the closet a hundred years hence? I think she will—a little; but by no means to such an extent as some others appear to think.

Lord Derby's version, then, is written in blank verse, and in a slightly conventionalised literary English. It thus comes closest in general characteristics and circumstances to Cowper. If we made the comparison of the two, without reading a line, we should be prepared to find Cowper the better poet and Lord Derby the better scholar. But even this will not settle offhand for us the question, Which is the nearer Homer? The old plan of actual citation may be best, and we may take one of the stock passages on which Wilson and others have descanted, prefixing the specimens from the chief earlier

blank and couplet verse-translators, which Wilson gives, with the Greek original and a literal translation from the Greek in prose, and then giving Lord Derby's own. Nothing for this purpose can be better than the famous nursery passage of the Sixth Book:

HOMER:

ὥς εἰπὼν οὗ παιδὸς ὀρέξατο φαίδιμος Ἑκτωρ·  
 ἄψ δ' ὁ παῖς πρὸς κόλπον ἐυζώνοιο τιθήνης  
 ἐκλίνθη λάχων, πατρὸς φίλου δψιν ἀτυχθεῖς,  
 ταρβήσας χαλκὸν τε ἰδὲ λόφον ἵππιοχαίτην,  
 δεινὸν ἅπ' ἀκροτάτης κόρυθος νεύοντα νοήσας.  
 ἐκ δ' ἐγέλασσε πατήρ τε φίλος καὶ πότνια μήτηρ.  
 αὐτίκ' ἀπὸ κρατὸς κόρυθ' εἴλετο φαίδιμος Ἑκτωρ,  
 καὶ τὴν μὲν κατέθηκεν ἐπὶ χθονὶ παμφανόωσαν,  
 αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ὃν φίλον υἱὸν ἐπεὶ κύσε πῆλὲ τε χερσίν,  
 εἶπε δ' ἐπευξάμενος Διὶ τ' ἄλλοισιν τε θεοῖσιν·

Which is, being interpreted with utmost literalness:

Thus saying bright Hector stretched out for his boy; but the boy lay back shrieking on the breast of his well-girt nurse, frightened at the sight of his dear father, disturbed both by the brass and the plume of horse's mane, perceiving it nodding terribly from the topmost helmet. And both his dear father laughed out and his revered mother. Thereupon bright Hector took his helmet from his head, and it indeed he placed, all shining as it was, on the ground; but his dear son he then kissed, and tossed him in his hands and spoke, praying to Zeus and the other Gods.

And here are the blank-verse or couplet versions (for Chapman is out of this particular running) of Hobbes (which Wilson does not give), Dryden, Pope, Cowper, Sotheby, and, lastly, Lord Derby:

## HOBBS:

And when he thus had said his arms he spread  
 The child to take, who, terrified thereby,  
 And unacquainted with a glittering crest  
 And horse's mane that nodding at it hung,  
 Turned his face crying to the nurse's breast  
 And with his little arms close to her clung:  
 Which made his father and his mother smile.  
 Then Hector on the ground his helmet laid  
 And took the child and dandled him awhile,  
 And then to Jove and all the gods he prayed.

## DRYDEN:

Then holding forth his arms he took his boy,  
 The pledge of love and other hope of Troy.  
 The fearful infant turn'd his head away  
 And on his nurse's neck reclining lay,  
 His unknown father shunning with affright  
 And looking back on so uncouth a sight,  
 Daunted to see a face with steel o'erspread  
 And his high plume that nodded o'er his head.  
 Then sire and mother smiled with silent joy,  
 And Hector hastened to relieve his boy:  
 Dismissed his burnished helm that shone afar—  
 The pride of warriors and the pomp of war—  
 The illustrious babe thus reconciled he took,  
 Hugged in his arms, and kissed, and thus he spoke.

## POPE:

Thus having spoke, the illustrious chief of Troy,  
 Stretched his fond arms to clasp the lovely boy;  
 The babe clung crying to his nurse's breast,  
 Scared at the dazzling helm and nodding crest.

With secret pleasure each fond parent smiled,  
 And Hector hastened to relieve the child:  
 The glittering terrors from his brow unbound  
 And placed the beaming helmet on the ground,  
 Then kissed the child, and lifting high in air,  
 Thus to the gods preferred a father's prayer.

## COWPER:

The hero ended and his arms put forth  
 To reach his boy; but with a scream the child  
 Still closer to his mother's bosom clung,  
 Shunning his touch—for dreadful in his eyes  
 The brazen armour shone; and dreadful more  
 The shaggy crest that swept his father's brow.  
 Both parents smiled delighted; and the chief  
 Let down the crested terror on the ground,  
 Then kissed him, played away his infant fears,  
 And thus to Jove and all the powers above.

## SOTHEYBY:

He spoke, and stretched his arms, and onward prest  
 To clasp his child and fold him on his breast;  
 The while the child on whose o'er dazzled sight  
 The helm's bright splendour flashed too fierce a light,  
 And the thick horsehair as it wavy played  
 From the high helmet cast its sweeping shade,  
 Scared at his father's sight bent back distressed  
 And shrieking sunk upon his nurse's breast.  
 The child's vain fear their bitter woe beguiled  
 And o'er the boy each parent sweetly smiled.  
 And Hector now the glittering helm unbraced  
 And gently on the ground its terror placed;  
 Then kissed and dandling with his infant played,  
 And to the gods and Jove devoutly prayed.

## LORD DERBY:

Thus as he spoke, great Hector stretched his arms  
 To take his child; but back the infant shrank,  
 Crying and sought his nurse's sheltering breast,  
 Scared by the brazen helm and horsehair plume  
 That nodded fearful on the warrior's crest.  
 Laughed the fond parents both, and from his brow  
 Hector the casque removed, and set it down  
 All glittering on the ground; then kissed his child,  
 And danced him in his arms, and thus to Jove  
 And to the Immortals all addressed his prayer.

These six translations may be said, without too great a stretch of accuracy, to represent the six half-centuries of English literature, between 1600 and 1900. Nor am I much afraid of any competent contradiction when I say that, if they be compared with each other, and with the original, Lord Derby's is the only one that deserves the name of a translation at all, while it is at least the equal, poetically, of all but Dryden's. It may seem to some that Hobbes ought to be left out of question, but I have purposely cited him to show that the most grovelling abstinence from any attempt at poetical beauty is compatible with very great inadequacy in rendering. Dryden, as usual, is Dryden, even if he is not Homer. He had, we know, his own theory of translation, and expressly disclaimed literal fidelity. His omissions are pardonable, and his insertions are poetry; but the thing is simply a free paraphrase, not a translation. And Mr. Pope? Mr. Pope, I own, here really shocks me. No reasonable person can question that the author of the finale of the *Dunciad*, of the character of Atticus, of the lines on

Lady Suffolk, was a poet—but if we only had this? To begin with, it is certain that the writer had neither the Greek nor any exact version from the Greek before him. He had simply Dryden. He follows Dryden where Dryden interpolates (cf. “silent” and “secret”, not merely additional, but false to the text, ἐκ δ' ἐγέλασσε, “relieve the child”, and so forth). His amplifications, unlike Dryden's, are of the true schoolboy *gradus* kind (cf. “fond arms”, and “lovely boy”). He is terrible. Nor is Cowper much better. “Mother”, for “nurse”, is simply a gross blunder, and “the crested terror” is an un-Homeric prettification. As for Mr. Sotheby, nothing more than this passage would be needed to justify the passing allusion of contempt on which Macaulay has left him impaled. Observe the clumsy babblement of the first eight lines, the idiocy of “sweetly” smiled and “gently” placed! In contrast with all these, Lord Derby's version, while not in the least tame, is simple, stately, and exact. It misses nothing of the slightest importance, and it inserts nothing superfluous. The only questionable thing is “sheltering”, for ἐνζώνοιο, and even here it may fairly be contended that the Homeric epithet means “*amply* girt”, and suggests that the child hid his face in the folds. In other words, it is a translation of the Greek, and it is comely and sufficient English; and what need mortals ask for more?

Further verbal comparison and criticism might not be very well in place here, but I think it will be admitted that Lord Derby holds his own very fairly, not merely in point of scholarship, but in point of poetry. In this last respect the main charge which he underlies is, of course,

that of "tameness". Something has been said or hinted on this head already; a little more may be added before concluding. Is it so very certain that the "simple and pathetic" stuff of the *Iliad*, if we separate from it the charm of the magnificent language and metre in which it is couched, is not sometimes "tame"? And if this is so, is it not the case that those translators of Homer who have managed, in some estimations at any rate, to disguise the tameness, have put on it, after the necessary stripping involved in the change of metre and language, clothing which is not Homer's at all? I own that I am rather inclined to this opinion, and that I am also rather inclined to think that Lord Derby's is the more excellent way. With him, at any rate, we have nothing that is *not* Homer, and we have everything of Homer's that is not ornament. I do not think myself that it is well to encourage people to think that they have the whole of Homer when they have not: and that is what most translations do. With a blank-verse version which is faithful, as this certainly is, there is no deception, and no possibility of mistake. If people want more, they should learn Greek. If they will not learn Greek, they can at least be sure that they will not, as I have known some good people do, incur the risk of going into ecstasies over beauties, or what they think beauties, which are not in the original at all, and have simply been stuck on by the translator, to comply with the demand for beautification.

## EDGAR ALLAN POE

I HOPE there is neither impertinence nor disqualification for my present business in confessing that my admiration for Poe does not rest upon [his] tales—or only on a very few of them. *Ligeia* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* satisfy me: though both would be better if they were shorter. But the pieces which attempt humour, like *Loss of Breath* and *Mummy*, almost make me an anti-Poeite, while those of pure horror are not much more to my taste. And for the “detective” kind, in which he can claim some fatherhood and an undoubted mastership, and for which the latest nineteenth and the earlier twentieth centuries have had so keen an appetite, I have no great affection. My pleasantest association with them is that, in early days, I remember English editions presenting us with a *Gold Beetle* instead of a *Gold Bug*. In its class *The Descent into the Maelstrom* is pretty faultless: and of the horrors, I used I think to prefer *The Cask of Amontillado*. This may have been partly because I liked Amontillado, but so I do still: and I did not find the other day when I re-read the story after many years, that I cared much for it. And even in the two excepted ones—perhaps owing to the fact that one of them contains one of his very best poems and the other not the worst—I find myself worried by the thought “Why is not this poetry?”. Now one of the first laws or cautions of criticism is: “Never



demand from any work something else than that which it presents itself as being, doing, offering. If you find that you can't help this, there is something really wrong either with the writer or with you." It must of course be left to third parties to decide which of these alternatives is here the case.

Not to neglect what is, in a curiously complicated way, something between poetry and prose—that is to say, drama—we must have a word or two on *Politian*. It is almost needless to say, though impossible to omit the saying, that this curious piece owes much to Professor Mabbott for elucidating its subject, castigating its text, and in other ways making the study of it more profitable and easier. But neither this nor any addition at all probable could much affect certain general conclusions about it. If we knew nothing about its date and authorship, most fairly acute and well-informed critics would put it down, now or at any future time as well as for the last half-century, as belonging to that singular period or division of English literature—ostensibly or formally theatrical—from which *The Cenci* shoots up like Ailsa Crag from the sea or the Wrekin from the flat country; which begins with Joanna Baillie and ends with Sir Henry Taylor, and the sea whereof may be allowed a few islets, the plain a hillock or two, like Milman's *Fazio* and Talfourd's *Ion*. It is perhaps a pity that Poe, who is in some ways so like his contemporary Beddoes, did not attempt the *Death's Jest-Book* vein; but as it is, one feels that he is not in his proper place. The few attempts at intermixed comedy are positively bad; *Politian* personally is weak Byron and water; while

the whole (and let no one say "But it isn't a whole", for a few scenes will do) is non-dramatic. You cannot imagine it acted with any success. Now a play may, I suppose, be bad to read and yet good to act; but I can't imagine its being good to read when it constantly suggests to the reader that it would be bad to act.

When Lowell,<sup>1</sup> or whoever it was, wrote "Mr. Poe *the poet*", the catch-sound of the words was no doubt, though not ill-naturedly, intentionally the object of the conjunction. But one might, without extravagance, take it seriously. To say that if Poe was not a poet he was nothing, would of course be extravagant. He is something more than a squadron-leader in the story-telling army: and I have myself, in books specially on the subject, done my little best to vindicate for him a higher place than has sometimes been allowed him, both in general and in metrical criticism. But his extreme inequality, arising in the main from insufficient education, injures his work in both respects; and, except in the points where it touches his poetry nearest, his tale-telling is at most "prime amid peers". As a poet he is absolutely alone. Lang gave him companions to a certain extent in William Morris and Gérard de Nerval; I have just suggested (again to a certain extent only)

<sup>1</sup> There was almost less bad blood between the two than between Poe and any other notable man of letters in his time and country. They principally disagreed about matters of prosody, in which I venture to think that Poe was the nearer to the truth. But I have always been sorry that in more than one or two conversations which I had with Mr. Lowell when he was in England in the 'eighties, Poe, so far as I can recollect, was never mentioned.

Beddoes; but none of these is exactly of the same variety of the same species of the same kind. Nothing, I think, is a better specimen passage of "Mr. Poe the poet's" poetry, on the smallest scale and neglecting the cumulative effect of his best pieces as a whole, than the famous couplet in *The Haunted Palace*:

Banners, yellow, glorious, golden  
On its roof did float and flow.

I have said of this in its strictly technical aspect that the trochees themselves "float and flow and settle with the soft slowness of snowflakes". But there is a great deal more than this to be said. In the first place there is the extraordinary manipulation of the vowel-music—the contrast of the prominent sounds *a* and *e* once each and then a whole cascade of *o* in different forms of its sound, with the minor detail of the trisyllabic "glorious" ("glorious" may be left to whosoever likes it) and its subtle connection with the monosyllabic ending "flow". All that is "music" in a way no doubt: and the additional effect given by the pause at each word of the first line may be such perhaps. But then there is appeal to a quite new sense—the sense of *eyes* of the mind, which insists for itself on the banners, the roof they float from, their colour, and their motion as they flow. You don't want—unless you are the kind of creature for whom "movies" were made and whom they satisfy—any "illustration"; the words make you see the things as they make you hear the music accompanying. And then there comes the tug-of-war between the two critical views of Poe and even between the two sections

of his admirers. There is something more which is not music nor picture, but is begotten in some uncanny, though by no means unholy, way by each on the other—the poetic effluence—the charm only perceptible to that *sense* of poetry which merciful nature has not withheld from myriads though it has only granted the power of production which satisfies it to a few.

Of course there is a certain kind of criticism which can amuse itself by shooting its arrows at the moon. For instance, I think I have seen objections taken to the pacification of Psyche in *Ulalume* by kissing her, on the ground that Psyche means soul and you can't kiss your—or any—soul. I am not myself so sure of the impossibility. Moreover, Poe addressed this Psyche as his “sister” and you certainly *can* kiss your own sister. Also, I should myself say that this classification of body and soul as brother and sister was not exactly an unpoetical one in itself. But criticism of this sort is better nonsuited than put to its trial on points. It is evidently a case of trying to light the blunt end of a match when chemical contact is required.

A few more short instances may be demanded. One might perhaps make a touchstone of the conclusion of *To Helen* (the first) by asking, “Is it as it stands—

Ah! Psyche, from the regions which  
Are Holy Land—

the same as if it were written in continuous Alexandrine:

Ah! Psyche, from the regions which are Holy Land?”

But that sample-item of what people are pleased, in this curious century of jargon, to call a *questionnaire* might

be rather treacherous. It is better perhaps not to take any example from *The Raven*: and *The Bells* have always disappointed me. The piece does not seem as if Poe had ever heard real *old* bells, which indeed is possible: and if the excellent Mrs. Shew is to be believed, the subject was suggested to, not imagined by him, and started with rather childish stuff about "little silver bells" and "heavy iron bells". Poe in some of his moods would have been much more likely to shift the adjectives and might have made something of the shifting.

But the three summits of his range—actually it would seem the latest as well as the highest of his exploits of climbing—*For Annie*, *Ulalume*, and *Annabel Lee*—are simply compact of "specimens", besides showing at its best what has not yet been dwelt on—his wonderful power of working "out and up", of *crescendo* and of producing an explosion after which there *must* be silence—a deliverance following which "there is namore to seyn". Although instances of the same method, they are not in the slightest degree replicas; each is entirely independent of the others.

Which of the three is "the best" it is unnecessary and probably unwise to inquire; perhaps there is not, except in mere quantity, any "better" or "best" in poetry: a thing is either poetry or it is not. It may be asked, "Is there no difference in intensity?" and perhaps there is: but all these are much on a par there. *For Annie* might, though one is loth to say it would, be improved by curtailment. You know, if you possess the faculty of knowing, that the thing is working up to some point and that point may seem to be unduly—at least

unkindly—delayed. This delay, too, gives chance to the danger which proverbially attends the sublime. The line

I am better at length

and indeed the whole stanza which it concludes offer “the sons of Belial” one of those “glorious’ times” which they seldom miss enjoying. But the magnificence of the first with its concluding couplet—

And the fever called living  
Is conquered at last—

should carry you over the second triumphantly to the first line of the third—

And I rest so composedly—

where the adverb is one of those single-word successes of which, considering the small bulk of his whole work in verse, Poe is so astonishingly full.

If the next half-dozen stanzas appeared alone one would certainly not care so much for them as at present: in a ferociously judicial mood you might even lift the blue pencil. But you have to put that down again very soon, with never the least subsequent temptation to take it up, some time before you come to those famous “Puritan pansies” which might induce the stoutest Cavalier to make a name-truce at least with Puritanism. And then after this gracious overture comes the main and never thenceforward failing *rise* of the piece—the introduction of Annie, and as it were the saturation of the poem with her presence and her actions and her name more and more to the end.

Observe, too, how the fellow, having got as it seemed the utmost out of word-fitness with "composedly", audaciously "does it again" in the same stanza with a repetition of that by the substitution of "contentedly"!

I suppose—indeed I may have already hinted at the proposition—that *Ulalume* is the prearranged and never-to-be-wholly-done-away-with battle-ground—the Belgium as it were of the Europe and not the Europe only of Poeian criticism. When Lang said fifty years ago that "it might require some moral courage to assert one's belief that the poem has an excuse for its existence", he was by no means speaking in mere irony and still less convicting that curious thing of imagination, "Victorianism", of one of its criminal follies. There were, at least in England, plenty of people who thought *Ulalume* quite deserving of existence: and I have seen within the last few months an expression of opinion already referred to, if not in the exact words, that she is not. For my own part, critical or not as the gods or the demons have made me, I cannot find speck or flaw in it, except that the name, capital for a poem, does not seem to me capital for a girl, and one other possible superfluity, of which presently. All the names, including *Ulalume* itself with the gloss I have given, and allowing the specialisation in rhyme to Auber, suit: there ought to be a Mount Yaanek, if there is not. The singular motion, as of a heavy-laden charger strongly bitted, which he has put on his anapaestic metre; the streak of charm introduced into the dreariness by the presence of Psyche, the "sisterly" Psyche;

the amazing stanza which concludes with what is a sort of motto-distich for Poe—

Astarte's bediamonded crescent

Distinct with its duplicate horn;

and any number of his marvellous single words, the most marvellous of which is the "immemorial" at the very heart and centre of the first stanza—all these things are there and a great deal more. If anybody says that it would be better without the last stanza, I don't know that I care to argue the point.

But if a critic need not be exactly a Zoilus to suggest thinning in *For Annie* and lopping in *Ulalume*, he is lost if he even thinks of the shears in connection with *Annabel Lee*. I can imagine a very *very* poor creature saying, no doubt with perfect truth, that the verb "to covet" will only take an accusative after it and not like "grudge" or "envy" a sort of ablative in the literal sense of that word or dative in the technical as well. One would pat his head and say, "Yes! Yes!" It was perhaps a whim that made Poe wrench the metre a little, without any need or profit, by putting "chilling" at the end of a line. But these are almost beauty-spots—if in the miraculous rush and blaze of the whole thing they are anything at all—the rush that takes one's breath away and the blaze that dazzles one's sight. I am happy enough to have read a not inconsiderable proportion of the poetry which has been vouchsafed to the world in the two great ancient and a few modern languages, with a large amount of sometimes tolerable verse. Of the latter we need say no more, while giving it its own honour in the degree in which it may deserve it. Of the poetry



there are many kinds: and in each kind there are degrees of glory. But in its own kind I know nothing that can beat, if I know anything that can equal, *Annabel Lee*. It begins quite quietly but with a motion of gathering speed and a sort of flicker of light and glow of heat: and these things quicken and brighten and grow till they finish in the last stanza, that incomparable explosion of rapturous regret that towers to the stars and sinks to the sea.

This, however, is no doubt terribly like fine writing, which is not my trade. Let us therefore conclude with perfectly plain prose. Some fifty years ago I was not allowed in England to call Poe "of the first order of poets"; fifty years after that I am able by kind permission of *The Dial* to call him so in his own country.

By what arguments this position was originally supported I cannot exactly say, for except the passage which Lang quoted I do not know what became of my rejected address. If I could not say with Landor that God is the only person of whom I would ask a thing twice, I certainly should not like to offer the same thing a second time, even to the most different person, after it had been once rejected. But I can sum up what has been here said shortly enough. A poet of the first order must be able to satisfy both the ears and the eyes of the mind; and beyond, though through, this satisfaction he must give the indefinable but by the right recipients unmistakable poetic "effluence", "emanation", or whatever you like to call it.

For me and for my house Poe does this.

## LONGFELLOW'S POEMS

WHEN the news of Longfellow's death reached London, nearly a quarter of a century ago, the evening papers published it just at the meeting time of a small private literary dining-club, of which he, Victor Hugo, and one or two other great foreigners were members. I happened to be in the chair (or vice-chair, I forget which) that evening; and thus it fell to my lot to propose the toast of his name, with the silent honours usual in such cases. I might, I think, have claimed the office by something more than right of accident. For few people can have been "brought up" upon at least the earlier works of the poet, as far as *Hiawatha*, more than I was from childhood; and I venture to hope that still fewer have been more faithful to their bringing-up. I have met since, and I have fallen in love with, poetry of very different kinds from Longfellow's, and (in some cases) of kinds, if the word must be used, "superior" to his. But I have never felt in the least inclined, in a capital popular phrase, to "put him out of his place". Indeed, I think that he is a most excellent text for preaching the doctrine that no poet, who is a poet, ever can be put out of his place by another, with any lover of poetry who understands as well as loves. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Longfellow is among the least difficult authors to

<sup>1</sup> [A biographical sketch is here omitted.]

read, and he should be among the easiest to criticise; though, owing to some faults of his own and more of his critics', he has not always proved so. It is certainly an unfortunate thing for a poet that his most universally known and perhaps, for a long time at any rate, his most popular poem should be one of his own worst. It is still more unfortunate (for after all, a poet cannot help the bad taste of his readers) that it should be bad of and in itself. It is most unfortunate of all that its badness should exaggerate, accentuate, and caricature certain rather too frequent characteristics of his. Now all these things are true of *Excelsior*. The most Rhadamanthine and the most ingenious of critics could hardly strain his severity or his ingenuity in finding fault with it. The title does not mean what it ought to mean to make any sense whatever of the piece; and does mean something quite different—a blunder which is accentuated by its being used as a refrain, and by the astoundingly unlucky description of it as in "an unknown tongue". The conduct of the ungrammatical youth is that of a mere lunatic; even Alpine Clubs, which were hardly founded when Longfellow wrote, would not defend it. That of the maiden would, in the famous French phrase, "make dragoons blush". And the theology of the conclusion matches the morality of the maiden and the Latinity and common sense of the youth, by intimating divine approval of what was, on the showing of the poet, pure suicide without a purpose or an aim—unless indeed the youth knew no other way to get to Italy to effect that improvement in his Latin of which there was such urgent need. The charges, often foolishly enough brought of late,

against mid-nineteenth-century "sentiment" are here amply justified. The whole thing is sheer silliness—silliness so intense that, with the accompanying want of scholarship, it would damn even an allowance of poetic expression much greater than that given here. One could but heartily wish the thing unwritten if it were not a curious literary *point de repère*, as to the way in which false taste, in poet and in readers at the same time, lashes the poet into a kind of paroxysm now and then.

But this paroxysm was never repeated. It is true, as has been said, that the worst things in it are caricatures and exaggerations of things that occur frequently in Longfellow; but these things in themselves are not despicable, and they are almost invariably accompanied by something else which redeems and transforms them. It will be, for most competent judges, something, that poets who may be called "greater", in critical slang, than he is—who are at any rate members of an extremely different school—have had a curious habit of "taking notes" from him, not in the manner which foolish people call plagiarism, but as poets take from poets. The use made by Baudelaire (not exactly an exponent of early or mid-Victorian sentiment) of *The Psalm of Life* in one of the finest of his poems, *Le Guignon*, is unmistakable, and has not been mistaken. Yet *The Psalm of Life* is one of the most mixed and dangerous of Longfellow's pieces;—it has been riddled with ridicule—or rather ridicule has attempted to riddle it, and has sometimes made a hole or two. Mr. Swinburne is scarcely of the Longfellovian fellowship as that is understood by unfavourable critics: and yet some of

the very finest and most characteristic verses of the Prelude to *Songs before Sunrise*—

Because man's soul is man's god still,

fall in curiously with a stanza of another of the *Voices of the Night*, "The Light of Stars" beginning—

The star of the unconquered will.

Those who like tracing parallel passages will have good game with Longfellow and his successors among the English-writing poets of the last seventy years. But is this because he has "imitated" others, or because others have "imitated" him in the silly sense which has been already blackmarked? Not at all. It is because to him, as to all true poets, the great commonplaces of life have presented themselves, and because he has known how to treat these commonplaces with the poetic treatment which makes them not common.

What may be said, not against but of Longfellow, with truth is that in treating these great commonplaces he is, as a rule, more indulgent to the common auditor than the greatest poets are, or than some who are not greater than he is; and that sometimes, as in *Excelsior* and elsewhere, this indulgence leads him astray. He is in almost all respects the opposite of his contemporary Browning, just as their other contemporary Tennyson makes up a trinity of opposites with them both. Longfellow is one of the most *automatic* of poets—to every subject that presents itself he gives, like some springs, a sort of coating of true and natural but never artificially finished poetry, varying a good deal with the quality of

his subject, the fulness or slackness, concentration or dilatation of the spring itself at the moment, and other accidents. Browning is the least automatic, the most determined to submit all matters that come in his way to an apparently eccentric process of his own—a process involving sometimes (not always) a minimum of artistic expenditure, but personal and wayward to the *n*th. Tennyson, as little automatic as Browning, is the pure artist, never satisfied till he has brought everything to his own ideal of perfection in expression and form. It follows that Browning cannot translate at all—he can only *transpose* into a key of his own utterly different from the original; that Tennyson has left us but a little translation or direct imitation, but that of curious perfection; that Longfellow almost seems to prefer translation, and while more than fairly faithful, manages always to give it a flavour of his own.

If we pass from his translations to his original verse, the same or an analogous quality confronts us. Longfellow is never startlingly felicitous; nor, on the other hand, does the sense of his felicity grow on us as we perceive more and more fully the exquisiteness of the art with which, but without artificiality, it is attained. You never have to question yourself, or him, to find out what he means; and you never are tempted almost or altogether to neglect his meaning, for the sake of the poetic supremacy with which it is conveyed. But that meaning is never contemptible—it is not so even in *Excelsior*, if the piece could be stripped of its absurdities of expression and ornament. It is sometimes very admirable; and it is almost invariably conveyed with less

or more—not unfrequently with a very considerable “more”—of poetic treatment.

Now these are the conditions and specifications of a kind of poet who never can be too plentiful, and who, as a matter of fact, is decidedly rare. If, as some people talk with commendable gravity, poetry is a high and holy thing which ought to be cultivated like religion—that which enables the greatest number of persons to cultivate it is surely to be welcomed. If, on the other hand, as light and frivolous folk prefer to insist, poetry is one of the greatest and absolutely the most harmless of pleasures—surely again, the man who offers this in a manner that the multitude can and do appreciate, is a benefactor of his species. Nay, more, there must as surely be something not of the first-comer, something which Apollo has not given to everybody, in the man who can do this. There are so many poets who have not succeeded in giving pleasure to anybody, whether of the great vulgar or of the small, whether of the promiscuous or the fastidious feeders!

We may, however, devote a few words to this “small vulgar” itself, and beat up its quarters briefly but without much mercy. For my own part, I made up my mind long ago that the critic who pooh-poohs Longfellow’s poetry is a bad critic. For one of the attributes of the critic is that he shall be, strictly by derivation and definition, a *separator*, a man who is able to discern the good from the bad, even though they be mixed like the heap of grain that Venus set Psyche to sort. A critic who must have his poetry sorted out for him, presented in its quiddity, “neat”, to vary the metaphor, may pride

himself upon his taste, but is in effect confessing his incompetence. In many cases, I fear, even the taste is not quite so genuine as it appears or would like to appear. The critics in question would too certainly at one time have adopted one current standard of poetic supremacy, at another another. At any rate, they may be left in the mire with this dilemma. If they cannot see the poetry in Longfellow because of the other things not quite so poetical which are there, they lack the first qualification of the critic, which is to know poetry when he sees it. If they cannot separate and judge it, they lack the second, which is to see it and treat it by itself. So, enough of them.

Adopting a different style of criticism ourselves, it may be well for us to survey the different divisions of the poet's verse, no one of which can be completely represented here, while large parts of it can only be represented at all by a sort of brick-of-the-house process. This last, however, is no such great misfortune, for Longfellow, in this not differing from most other poets, is by no means at his best in his longest poems, even the non-dramatic ones. Of the dramatic pieces, *The Spanish Student* and the little miracle-play inserted in *The Golden Legend* are by far the best. But of course it is open to anyone to say that neither is a *play* at all; the second being a mere clever *pastiche*, while the first is partly that, and still more a loosely told but capital story which the whim of the writer has thrown into dramatic instead of narrative form. And there is a good deal in this, though for my part I should not like *The Spanish Student* so well if it were not partly in verse,



and I never read it afresh without liking it better. The *New England Tragedies*, the *Divine Tragedy (Christus)*, and *Michael Angelo* are exposed to the same critical description, which, however, would have to take a more uncomplimentary colouring. The slight but ambitious *Masque of Pandora* is by no means without merit; but it wanted another man, and above all a younger man, to write it.

Very pedantic critics of form might object to the separation of *The Golden Legend* itself from this group. To my fancy, however, it occupies a middle place between the dramatic and the purely narrative pieces. It proceeds, no doubt, as the excellent old French phrase has it, "by personages"—there are names as shoulder-headings to the different paragraphs of the verse. But in reality it is nearly as pure a narrative as the original *Der Arme Heinrich* of Hartmann von der Aue, from which it was taken. The speakers (except perhaps Elsie) have no personality—we can neglect them altogether, or at least regard them as the personages of a poem with "then said So-and-so" forming part of the verse. Often, there is no reason why there should be any "So-and-so" at all. The thing is really a sort of dreamy panorama with a certain number of cinematograph effects to enliven it—a thing that poets found out ages and ages before panoramas or cinematographs were invented or thought of. And it is (to me at least) a very delightful thing. I happen to have a fairly wide acquaintance with medieval poetry in the original tongues, and a great devotion to the Middle Ages. I do not say that Longfellow has gone very deeply into medieval sentiment.

It was not his way to go very deeply, or to *appear* to go very deeply (which is perhaps a different thing), into anything. He may in parts and passages be at a disadvantage with Mr. William Morris, as he certainly is in *The Wayside Inn*. But here also his "superficiality", as it seems to some folk, has a curious quality of not being so very superficial after all. His etching is not deeply bitten; his colour is but a sort of preliminary wash. But somehow or other both are right as far as they go, and both give to the spectator an effect much more trustworthy than some far more heavily treated plates and pictures. The opening *diablerie*, and that of the scene between Prince Henry and Lucifer; the "Tale of the Monk Felix" and Elsie's of the Sultan's daughter; Lucifer in the church; the Prince's picture of the cathedral; Friar Claus in the cellar; the Abbess's soliloquy; the Prince and Elsie at Genoa; the voyage; the crucial scene, and the lovers' final dialogue—are things as to which I shall respectfully ask any critic to be very sure of his criticism before he dismisses them as ordinary. We must try to make room for most of them here; and if we have to leave out any, the omission will more than justify itself should it send anyone to the original. I think I can promise that, if he has any natural taste for poetry, he will not be satisfied till he knows the whole of the poem itself. For combined variety and charm there is nothing of Longfellow's in bulk that can be compared to it.

At this point, years ago at any rate, there would have been, supposing that many people read the words which I have just written, a chorus of indignant voices, inter-

rupting to cry, "What! do you mean to say that you prefer this second-hand medieval medley to *Evangeline*?" Certainly, I prefer it very much; and what is more, I am certain, as I by no means always am, that, whether I prefer it or not, it ought to be preferred. *Evangeline* is a pretty poem; it lends itself admirably to illustration for drawing-room-table books; it was a clever revival of an old though hopeless experiment in metre; its sentiment is not false; and it has some beautiful passages. We need not attach the slightest importance to the American criticism which says that Longfellow did not take the trouble to go west and south to get local colour for the bayous and the prairies—that he is not true to it. I think the bayous rather nice myself; and, as I am not likely ever to visit the originals, I do not care whether they are like or not. We need not attend to the grave historians who tell us (I believe quite correctly) that the Acadians, instead of being mercilessly, were rather long-sufferingly dealt with. These things do not matter to poetry at all. The poem, as it seems to me, suffers from two quite different defects, one of matter, one of form. The weakness in matter is twofold. In the first place, the characters, with hardly the slight exception of "Basil the Blacksmith", have no character at all. Longfellow is never very strong at this; but even Elsie in the *Legend* is far more of a person than Evangeline, and Prince Henry than Gabriel. Secondly, the pathetic conclusion is one of those "possible improbabilities" which, as all good critics have noticed from the dawn of criticism, are far worse than probable impossibilities. How did all those years pass? Of course, if Evangeline

made a point of a "stern chase", if she insisted on always coming up with Gabriel (as an Irishman might say) just after he had gone somewhere else—there is nothing to say. But when she settled at Philadelphia it was different. The post may not have been very effective, and there may have been no newspapers to advertise in; but trappers wandered everywhere, and though, as I have said, it is possible, it is in the very last degree improbable that even three or four years could have passed, let alone the twenty or thirty required by the story, before Gabriel heard of her whereabouts. It is all very well to say that this is a prosaic criticism, like Mrs. Barbauld's when she told Coleridge that *The Ancient Mariner* was deficient in probability. Coleridge has brought it about that the *poetical* reader of *The Ancient Mariner* never thinks about probability: and Longfellow has not done this. He has not achieved the "suspension of disbelief", in Coleridge's own great words.

We ought, however, to give some special attention to the form of this, which is also the form of *The Courtship of Miles Standish*—the English hexameter. Longfellow had tried this earlier, in his translation of Tegnér's *Children of the Lord's Supper* and one or two other pieces. It was not surprising that so careful a student of the Germans—who had taken to the metre pretty far back in the eighteenth century—should attempt it; but the previous experiments of Coleridge might have influenced him even without this. I shall frankly say that for my part I believe this English hexameter to be a hopeless and impossible mistake, always and in every form, *as such*;—though it can be made a very effective

measure by letting it follow its natural bent with us and become anapaestic. But this is not the place for a prosodic disquisition of the general kind. We must confine ourselves to the special faults or merits of Longfellow's hexameter. The defects of the whole, and of most individual lines, seem to me—in spite of some passable verses and a few effective and fairly sustained passages—to be undeniable. The chief of them, which in a way includes or excuses all or most of the others, is a quality for which French has one short and final word of three letters, *mou*; but which we cannot indicate at all exactly by "soft", and only piecemeal and inadequately by "flaccid" and others. The line lacks spring, coil and recoil, resilience and its corollary resonance. I myself think the not uncommon opinion that English has few spondees incorrect; but Longfellow is very unlucky with his, though, oddly enough, he is fond of that rather dangerous thing the spondaic ending. Usually he oscillates between almost wholly dactylic lines of a very loose, fragile, and rickety construction, and spondees of such a questionable character as

*She in turn* related her love and all its disasters,

where it is difficult to say whether "she in"—which is little more than *one* syllable, or "turn-re"—which hardly any pronunciation will get into more than a trochee, is the more incompetent representative of the double-long foot. But not to spend too much time upon technical details (which could be largely multiplied, but for which we have no room), it may be said, I think, without any injustice, that, save in a few passages, the

effect of the whole is monotonously slipshod, and very inferior to that even of rhythmical prose.

*The Courtship of Miles Standish* itself needs little notice; none indeed as far as the vehicle is concerned. It was naturally interesting to Americans, as dealing with the rather slender and not always pleasant materials of their early history, and to the poet and his friends as embodying a family tradition. But these things of course have nothing to do with poetic merit itself. As a story it is so slight that to criticise it as such—to point out that Priscilla is rather pert for a Puritan maiden, and that John Alden is a nincompoop or something worse—would be absurd. But if people like it they may; I suppose those who do would call it “idyllic”.

Not thus to be dismissed is *Hiawatha*, though a great deal of what has been said by others about *Hiawatha*, its fidelity to authorities, the trustworthiness of these authorities, and so forth, may be dismissed with alacrity and decision. It is enough to say that the effect which the poet wished to produce—the presentation of an entirely strange civilisation, or half-civilisation, with imagery, diction, metre and all, adapted in strangeness—is well and even triumphantly achieved. No matter where he got the metre, and no matter whether he mixed the local colour in more senses than one. The whole is of a piece—united and congruous in effect, without gap or jar. And this is a merit which some people put highest in poetry, and which nobody can put low. Of course, the Devil's Advocate, seeing his advantage, may go on and ask whether it is not all rather *too* complete, rather *too* much of a piece—whether

the unvarying and unvaried plainsong of the trochaic dimeter does not "get on the nerves" after a time, and not so very long a time; whether the constant repetition of barbaric words with their English synonyms does not overpass the effect of strange terms in poetry, and begin to produce rather that of reading a lexicon; whether Longfellow's old defect of insufficiently marked character — though Pau-puk-Keewis and Iagoo, and even Nokomis, have some—is not unfortunately felt. Perhaps the poet's counsel will have to "confess and avoid" a little in this part of the matter. But on reading *Hiawatha* again, after a good many years' interval, I find that it bears the test much better than some things which I used to like when I liked it first, and which the outrage of time has, I fear, irreparably defaced for me. Perhaps it would stand shortening or thinning; but then it is fair to remember that it is, from one point of view, such a mere "bundle of episodes"—there is so very little connection running through it, except the unity of treatment spoken of above, and the presence of *Hiawatha* as a sort of "hero-when-wanted"—that there is no need to read it all at once. Read in batches, and at the right moment, it is very good reading, not merely for the exotic manners and unfamiliar imagery, not merely for the pleasant if not overdone music of the soft, strange, Indian names, but for other things more sheerly poetical. Indeed, as I look through the twenty-two cantos yet again, to determine what to give here, the whole being impossible, I find myself rather unexpectedly confronted with that other difficulty, what *not* to give, which is the selector's greatest compliment. I have

given rather less than I might, with the same hope, as in the case of *The Spanish Student* and *The Golden Legend*, that the fragments will serve as baits.

Of Longfellow's *magnum opus* in a certain sense, *The Tales of a Wayside Inn*, I shall not say much. It was a little unfortunate, as I have said, in coinciding with a not wholly dissimilar attempt, Mr. William Morris's *Earthly Paradise*, which has not only much more art as a whole, but a much higher level of poetical merit in the parts. Where the contact is even closer, as in *King Robert of Sicily*, the contrast is especially disastrous. But read in itself, and as a frank attempt at tale-telling in verse rather than at narrative poetry, it is good pastime enough, and sometimes something very much better. The worst thing about it is its exceeding inequality. The opening story, *Paul Revere's Ride*, has the drawback that the excellent Paul does not seem to have run the slightest danger, though, if his friend in the belfry had been observed and caught (as he ought to have been), and hanged (as he might have been with much better right than André), it would have given some point. *The Ballad of Carmilhan*, again, is an imitation of the worst German manner—sham "silly sooth"; its failure being intensified by the reminder which the name gives of a very different thing in German, Hauff's most powerful and gruesome prose story. Elsewhere there are excellent things—much if not all of *The Saga of King Olaf*, and many smaller ones. But the distinction which I have just drawn had better be kept in mind throughout.

And so we are left with those shorter poems which, if people would only throw away mistaken traditional



theories of poetry, are the real test of a poet's gift, unless he is an altogether exceptional person as well as poet, like Dante. In a short poem, the poet has only got to attend to the poetry. He can leave the story and the characters to the persons to whom they properly belong—the novelist and the dramatist. There is nothing to prevent him being as "subjective" or as "objective" as he chooses. Instead of being more or less tied to one metre, he may try a hundred in as many different poems. He has not the slightest excuse for "padding"; and his critics have no excuse for excusing him if he does pad. The immense, the legitimate, the natural charm of variety, instead of having to be painfully sought for, presents itself unsought to him, unless he is so incompetent that *ex hypothesi* he falls out of our consideration. From the stock objections of the criticaster to digressions, episodes, purple patches, etc., he is free by the very fact of the matter.

Accordingly, all Longfellow's best work is of this kind, and there is a very great deal of it. He never lost his skill at it, from the early *Voices of the Night* to the singularly beautiful introduction of *Ultima Thule*. If he made his worst slip here in *Excelsior*, he redeemed that slip by almost literally a hundred things that were not slips. As to the objections to "sentiment", "convention", "over-facility" and the like, I have hinted the lines of an impregnable fortification against them above, and it is not necessary to expand or emphasise these lines much. Sentiment, when it becomes (as it has rather a tendency to become) sentimentalism, is not the best of things; but it is at any rate better than the cheap

and childish paradox, and much better than the banal brutality, which have been sometimes offered in its place. All conventions (except in pure "manners") are bad; but a clean and kindly convention is, at any rate, less bad than a dirty and ill-natured one. As for over-facility, that opens a very difficult critical question, which I venture to think not many of the objectors are quite learned in their craft enough to handle. For this quality is very intimately connected with that other, of adapting poetry to the general capacity, which has been noted above.

For my part, I am sorry "as a Christian" (compare Rowena's observation and Wamba's comment) for those who cannot see poetry in Longfellow's lyrics; but my sorrow in any other capacity is a good deal tempered by uncharitable doubt whether they *really* see the poetry of Poe or of Whitman, of Rossetti or of Blake. I am extremely glad, as a matter of pure humanity, that there are a large number of persons who can and do see it.

It is to be seen in various forms and ways—in description, suggestion, musical accompaniment of thought. Of the two famous poetic processes, Longfellow, no doubt, oftener adopts that of adorning and exalting the familiar than that of seizing and making familiar the strange; but it would be unjust (the refusal is indeed at the root of all the injustice that has been done to him) to refuse him command of a certain middle way, a combination of the two nearer to the earth than to the ether, but not involving banishment from this latter. And this is what makes his companionship and guidance so valuable for those who are not exactly at home on the mountain-tops of poetry; who cannot (or cannot

at first) breathe its more rarefied air. Some, of course, of his things, especially the *Psalm of Life* itself, are so hackneyed, so sullied by the ignoble use of cheap quotation and stale tagging of morals, that it needs the accident of fresh acquaintance, or the much rarer property of that real critical spirit which is proof against all hackneying, to enjoy them thoroughly. Others, like *The Bridge* for instance, pay the rather comic and unfair but very real penalty of being so indissolubly associated with their usual musical setting that the actual poetical music is, as it were, dinned out of hearing. But in late work as in early, in the unhackneyed things as in the hackneyed, there never fails for long together, or rather there is almost always present, this unpretentious and apparently easy gift of communicating something of poetical treatment, something of poetical effect, to everything, or almost everything, that is touched. It may be a happy epithet of description; it may be a musical phrase or rhythm; it may be a suggestion of thought or feeling just charmed into freedom from the merely prosaic and banal; it may even be a borrowed plume of reading freshly set in the poet's cap, a relish of out-of-the-way literature happily instilled; it may be a dozen other things tedious to particularise. But the poeticising—the disrealising and yet realising—touch is always in it, or in it so often as to obscure and cover the failures. Nay, these failures themselves, save in one or two cases, especially that gibbeted above, are themselves so modest and so little offending, that, even without the successes, they would almost escape notice. The entire absence of pretentiousness is here also a

wonderful preservative. Longfellow may be sometimes insignificant, he may oftentimes have the rather evanescent touch of the *improvisatore*, but he is never positively dull or offensive, rarely absurd.

Not often has a poet made a more definite promise than in the *Voices of the Night*, which, be it remembered, appeared in 1839 after a considerable apprenticeship both to speech and silence, but some years before the capital appearances of Tennyson in the *Poems* of 1842, and of Browning in *Bells and Pomegranates*. They are all given here as they were finally united by their author; and though no large handful, it is a handful of very pleasant delights. The Prelude—with its well-chosen combination of the metrical qualities of the Ballad quatrain and the Romance six—is really a remarkable fore-shadowing of Longfellow's poetical career, and the baggage he was to take with him on it: the delight in Nature; the delight in a quiet but not vulgar fancy; the delight in literature; the sympathy with humanity; the sense—rather remarkable in a person of so equable a temper, and showing itself at a time when the "browner shades" were not even near—of the passing of time and the vanity of things. And this variety shows itself at more development in what follows—the graceful *Hymn to the Night*; the "fine confused feeding" and "extremely valuable thoughts", as Wordsworth said of his own poems, of the *Psalm of Life*; the more than pretty sentiment of *The Reaper*, and the not less than fine bravery of *The Light of Stars*.

For the two original ballads, *The Skeleton in Armour* and *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, I shall never shirk

declaring admiration. If not the strongest of meat, they are dishes of milk very well crumbled with bread for poetical babes; and the said babes, when they grow up, will be very lucky if they find no worse food even then, and may come back to them with relish from the strong meat itself. The first *Miscellaneous Poems* sustain the note well, 'especially *It is not always May*; and *The Goblet of Life* is, I think, better than its *Psalm*, a sentiment which may sound immoral, but which corresponds to the general experience of critical readers of poetry.

*The Belfry of Bruges* shows Longfellow in that peculiar character of his, the character of a poetical cicerone of foreign lands and the things appertaining to them, and the note is not monotonous. It is true that there are some weak things here which, accordingly, we do not give, it not being necessary, as in the case of *Excelsior*, to justify unfavourable criticism, to escape the charge of *not* giving the poet's most famous things. *The Arsenal at Springfield*, for instance, is a piece of mere claptrap, out of harmony with some of his own most spirited work, and merely an instance of a cant common at the time, though unhappily not unknown in many other times.

Of the *Songs and Sonnets*, *Seaweed* is peculiarly beautiful, and the famous *The Day is Done* is one of those which I shall not throw to the sentiment-hunting wolves. The sonnet itself was not one of Longfellow's special domains; he was not quite intense enough for it in meaning on the one hand, nor quite impeccable enough in form on the other. *The Evening Star* is the best of them, *The Cross of Snow*, for all its pathetic

subject (his wife's death) and its not unhappy idea, being ruined by the *unblessed* word "*benedight*".

But I am letting myself be betrayed into too much particularisation. To specify the pleasant things in *The Seaside and the Fireside* and in *Birds of Passage* would most unjustifiably curtail the room available for those good things themselves. Let me only mention *The Building of the Ship*, so admirably conducted and climaxed, with its famous and justly praised political ending—one of the rare pieces of political verse which need no special prejudice in favour of their sentiments to conciliate admiration; *Chrysaor*, the most Browningsque thing in Longfellow; the *almost* adequate *Secret of the Sea*, and the delectable *King Witlaf's Drinking-Horn*, in the first parcel: the stately and noble *Ladder of St. Augustine*, and *Haunted Houses*, *My Lost Youth*, the once more famous *Golden Mile-stone*, *Santa Filomena*, *Sandalphon* (oddly suggestive and unsuggestive of a poet of the next generation who has never had his meed, Mr. O'Shaughnessy), *Weariness*, and many another, in the second.

Some think this kind of sampling an impertinence, but I do not believe that either good poets or good critics agree with them. One is only performing the modest duty of an ancient apprentice, when he shouted, "What d'ye lack?" and vaunted the wares offered. If they were good wares they were none the worse, and those who were induced to buy them were the better. And these are good wares!

## WALTER PATER

THERE appear to be signs, both public and not public, of a widening and deepening interest in the author of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. Some new books on him are actual; more are spoken of as in preparation; and (which is perhaps more significant still) one is told that attention to him, always more or less rife, except in very early days, at his own University, has notably increased there. Certainly this is not a thing to be regretted in itself, but on the contrary to be welcomed. To the present writer it seems not less, but more than it did thirty years ago—at the time when, as Mr. Pater himself was pleased to say, very few of his critics had seen what he was aiming at—that the book named above was, is, and is likely to remain one of the most noteworthy *points de repère* in the English literature of the later nineteenth century. It seems also that this book and some (not quite all) of those that followed, occupied and defined a critical standpoint which had been only occasionally reached, and never very definitely or consciously held, before. And it seems, further, that this critical standpoint connects itself, not merely with the criticism of literature but with that of life, in a manner likely to be very important indeed. Perhaps these are obvious seemings; *vérités*, if not *secrets*, de *Polichinelle*. But perhaps also not.

One thing, however, which does not seem to have

been very obvious to some, but which is very certain, is that Pater and Paterism are things rather ambiguous and double-edged: and that if special interest is being excited by them, among young men more particularly, it is very desirable that the right interpretation of the ambiguity, the right side or handle of the weapon, should be got hold of. Nor is this altogether easy, especially when it is remembered that mankind is disastrously prone to take things rather from the interpreters who occur than from the things themselves. Now, once more, it is not altogether easy to interpret Pater.

It would no doubt be an arrogant absurdity if one were to say that no one but an Oxford man can understand him. Indeed, the absurdity would transcend the arrogance. Anybody with due pains, and (it is true this is rather a large proviso) the due wits, can understand anybody. But understanding is a partly passive, and, one may almost say, a wholly inarticulate performance. Interpretation, on the other hand, is wholly articulate and wholly active. It is when a man begins this active and articulate process that his troubles and his dangers begin likewise. He cannot, without the most superhuman efforts, prevent himself from speaking his own speech and acting his own action: and he will be clever indeed if he does not put that speech and that action in the place of his subject's, which may have been extremely different. I feel, for instance, quite certain that a Cambridge Pater, or a non-academic Pater, would have been an entirely different person from the actual. Yet when a Cambridge interpreter or a non-



academic interpreter gives the portrait, it will go hard but it will be the Cambridge Pater or the non-academic Pater that he gives us. After a time these difficulties and dangers disappear, but for a time they last; and during that time the difficulties are very difficult and the dangers not a little dangerous. Nor is personal knowledge, which is sometimes supposed to be an almost absolute qualification, by any means an absolute safeguard. I knew Mr. Pater myself; not intimately, but for a considerable number of years. I had known him before the *Studies* appeared, and I knew him after. But I do not think my personal knowledge of him helped me nearly so much to comprehend him and his work as the fact that, though I was a younger man by more than one Oxford generation, the days which we saw were, in a larger sense, the same days. They were those of the interval between the first and second University Commissions, to take rigid dates: those of the late 'fifties, the whole of the 'sixties, and the very early 'seventies more loosely.

It is often, and perhaps not unfairly, said that no man is a fair judge of his own University period, or of any period in which he has been a participator. "The shapes arise", as Whitman has it, in too bewildering a crowd, and with too fascinating or repulsive associations. But I think this period at Oxford *was* a remarkable one.<sup>1</sup> It has had no history yet: and it can hardly have one from the now dwindling number of men who actually took

<sup>1</sup> "It was the time of roses,  
We plucked them as we passed."

[MS. note here by G. S.]

part in it. Those who, like myself, saw it only as undergraduates, although they may have enjoyed the full limit of five years, scarce saw enough; those who, as undergraduates and dons, saw the whole or a more or less great part of it, are likely to have been "lost in the trees" of ever-changing experience. Those who even in the same University, much more outside of it, came later, could hardly escape the disqualifications of the immediate successor. Two instances of this may be referred to. One was the again and again repeated surprise of reviewers, when the *Life of William Morris* appeared, that he and his friends should have greatly esteemed Miss Yonge's *Heir of Redclyffe*. Another was the suggestion—made freely in the lifetime of the person concerned, and arousing in him the only serious and genuine indignation that I ever saw in him—that the late Bishop of London [Creighton] was a conforming free-thinker. The citations are not irrelevant to what will be here said of Pater himself.

Oxford, merely as Oxford, in the days which passed between Pater's introduction to it and the appearance of the *Studies*, was in one of those stages of transitional ferment which are almost invariably fruitful in effect on the emotions and the intellect of those who possess either the one thing or the other or both. The alterations of the first Commission—the throwing open of previously close scholarships and fellowships; the multiplication of professorships, and the attempt to make them serious instruments of University instruction, not so much in place of as in supplement to the exclusive tutorial system; the diminution, though not yet the

dethronement, of the clerical element; the sharper, if not yet very sharp, attention to business inculcated on both undergraduates and dons; the gradual change introduced by these and other innovations into the *personnel* and the *moral* of the whole University—these things were unquestionable. But as yet they worked very gradually, and like other drugs, displayed their beneficial long before they manifested their toxic effect. The sharp quarrels of the Oxford Movement had died down, leaving it practically triumphant, affecting the religious attitude of dons and undergraduates alike almost wholly for good, and that not only in the High Church direction. The most remarkable Evangelical whom I ever knew, the "Oxford Evangelist", Bazely, of Pater's own college, was a senior contemporary of my own, a junior of his. Socially, things were interesting. There was still among the dons a large steadying element of the older type; the decree (to use a somewhat later joke) that all the world should get married had not yet gone forth.

But the merely disreputable don was nearly, if not quite, extinct. Among undergraduates the snobbery which had made Landor quarrel with a man for "entertaining servitors", and which, if we may believe Thomas Hughes, existed still to some extent not twenty years before Pater went up, had almost entirely disappeared. There was no prejudice against reading; and I think that the late Professor York Powell was quite wrong when, in writing of the late Mr. Grant Allen, he said that there was a prejudice against unconventionality. If you were a gentleman and a good fellow

(with a liberal interpretation of the first requisite) you might, so far as I remember, be as unconventional as you chose. But it was certainly still the general idea that an undergraduate should, as much as possible, be an "all-round man"—that he should not *merely* read; that if he were not great at sports he should at any rate take an interest in them; that he should not wholly eschew wines and suppers and such more forbidden but harmless things as college steeplechases; that he might fill his rooms with "triptychs and Madonnas" or keep strange beasts in them, or compose (at the expense of mild objurgations from his neighbours) waltzes by dint of trying them for weeks in an inchoate condition on his piano; or do anything else in reason, and sometimes a little out of it.

From the larger world outside came larger elements of fermentation—the change from forty years of peace to the Crimean War, the Indian Mutiny, the Italian and American Revolutions, the great Continental earthquakes of '66 and '70; the recrudescence, after the unnatural concordat of the later Palmerston years, of the agitation for Parliamentary reform; the thought-fuses of *The Origin of Species* and of *Essays and Reviews*; above all, the establishment for the first time of Tennyson as a reigning poet and of Browning as a recognised one, with the soon-coming development of the Pre-Raphaelite school in poetry following on that in art; the growing popularity of Ruskin; the revival of criticism under Matthew Arnold; the great development of the history, the newspaper, the novel; the new interest in French literature; the return to the interest in

Italian. Some of these things were hardly outside influences: they grew almost as much inside Oxford as out of it; others affected Oxford as they affected the nation at large. All constituted a sort of yeast, from one point of metaphor—from another a phantasmagoria of objects of attention and interest—to which there had been nothing parallel since the times of the French Revolution—to which there had been, perhaps, nothing fully parallel since the times of Renaissance and Reformation themselves.

Into this Witches' Cauldron (with the greatest of enchantresses, Oxford, roused from her indifferent fit, and stirring it actively) Pater entered in the fateful year 1858—the very year (to take the most opposed symptoms of change) of *The Defence of Guenevere*, and almost the year (it might have been quite) of *The Origin of Species*. His first college, Queen's, was not at the time of the most distinguished, in that mysterious order which has nothing to do with age, wealth, numbers, or anything else appreciated by the outsider, and which varies from time to time as mysteriously. It was but two or three years since Mr. Verdant Green had had pointed out to him two Queen's men standing under their cupolaed porch as "confessing their shame"; and the Reverend Edward Bradley, though no Oxford man, had of the things of Oxford a knowledge almost uncannily "extensive and peculiar", as well as accurate. But Queen's was an ancient and famous foundation: it has still some and had then more of those medieval ceremonies which are among the most powerful spells of the Enchantress; and it is at least a curious coincid-

ence that it was for a time also the college of Addison—between whom and Pater, under superficial differences of period and the like, the *cognoscenti* have always discovered still more remarkable resemblances. But Pater's transference as a fellow to Brasenose (after he had had, in common with Newman, Matthew Arnold, and other unfortunate persons, the unforgettable but not perhaps actually disastrous experience of "missing his first"), though it did not give him the incomparable local surroundings which were given by Addison's to Magdalen, changed his atmosphere in the best possible manner. It exposed him (as a don it is true, and not as an undergraduate, but at a time when the absolute partition wall between the two was being much broken down) to all the influences above enumerated, and many others.

In such conditions strong natures either show one or two of the influences strongly, or exhibit a more or less eclectic and independent submission to many of them. I remember that, a year or two after Pater's election to Brasenose, but in another college, an abortive scheme was formed of a club not to be limited to any particular college itself, but to consist of men who had got their first in "Mods", who took an interest in as many different things as possible, and who were to be called "The Eclectics". It was as much of a jest as of a regular project; and it did not so much die as remain in embryo. But I think it expressed, with that half-conscious caricature which is natural to the undergraduate, a very general tendency of the place. It was as different as possible from the proposition of the

earlier Liberal school to "consider everything an open question". On the contrary, you were to take which side you liked on as large a number of questions as possible, and fight like a "Swiss of Heaven" for that.

Pater's own nature was not exactly combative, though it was capable of combativeness; but I must have been very unclear, or my readers must be very unagile in following, if they are not ready to adjust what has been said to what is coming. In a welter of interests and influences like that described, there are hardly more than two life-belts which will keep you fully in the swim, and at ease in it. The one is mere intellectual *understanding* of as many of them as possible—the sort of thing at which Goethe aimed, though he did not quite achieve it. The other is an intelligent, but not merely intellectual, *enjoyment* of them all, or of as many of them as your nature makes it possible to enjoy. I need not say that it was the second to which Pater was attracted: or that he achieved something like a philosophy of it. The famous "Neo-Cyrenaicism" (though the name will do it no harm except with the foolish people who dread names as much as the other foolish people affect them) needed not the pre-existence of any Cyrene or of any Aristippus to suggest it. These eclectic interestings of oneself—these "single-instant pleasures"—can easily be co-ordinated. If the application of the system to the Fine Arts took particular prominence in Pater's case, it was partly an accident. Such application is easier there than anywhere else: and at the same time it had been so little done in English that

it was tempting. It had been done more as regards literature; but seldom if ever systematically, and with strange shirkings and shrinkings: while the leading literary teacher of Oxford at the moment—Matthew Arnold—was anathematising it in theory at the very same time that he rather leant to it in practice. But Pater carried it much further than some people, who do not know his work, think. He applied it early and (after a certain interval) late to philosophy proper. To politics he did not: politics, I think, speaking under correction, was his blind side—the side on which he took the liberty (inalienable from humanity) to be obstinately *uninterested* in something. (The importance of this blind side is too little recognised; it gives a great rest and refreshment to the system, but it sometimes is found in unfortunate places.) He certainly applied his system to religion: and was most profoundly, sincerely, reverently interested in that. And so of other things, though, no doubt, not of all. The perfecting, refining, illuminating of interest in things—that is the true Paterism. Degradations of it are, of course, easy, and rather disastrously possible. Caricatures of it are also easy, and rather contemptibly obvious. But in itself it seems to me to be a highly respectable, as well as attractive, creed: and I would undertake to reconcile it with the extremest orthodoxies of the best kinds. The more your interests are, the better; the higher, the nobler, the purer the subjects of them are, of course, the better; but the main thing is to get *themselves* intensified, purified, ennobled; to make sure that they are *your* interests; to clear the mind in regard to them of con-



vention and of cant; to clear it of confusion and commonplace; to make the flame (in that famous epithet which, with its context, I think he rather unwisely cut out) :“gem-like”, the essence quintessential, the gold free from alloy. That is the principal thing. Pater and Carlyle are not often thought of together; but it would not be so very difficult to establish a concordat, and something more, between them. And I seem to remember some not unimportant and not infrequent texts of Scripture under which the Paterian of the better kind may take very confident shelter. At any rate, anything more ignorant or absurd than the confusion of the doctrine with a mere dallying in the bowers, if not even wallowing in the styes, of Acrasia it is difficult to conceive. Unscrupulous satire may have encouraged this confusion: false brethren may have encouraged it further by their example; the natural inertia and gullibility of the public mind may have fostered it. But it is a confusion and a blunder of the most unpardonable kind: and the worst of it is, as in other similar cases, that it does positive as well as negative harm. It is comparatively unimportant that anybody should misunderstand Pater, and therefore not follow him; it is a very serious thing indeed for the individual, and even for others, that anyone should misunderstand Pater and follow his own misunderstanding.

In this short paper it would be impossible to apply what has been said to the different books; but the paper on its own scheme would be quite incomplete without some application to the famous *Style*. It is here that Pater's own temperament comes in—that *l'homme même*

takes up the illustration of the man's system. To what extent and how early the influence of Flaubert exerted itself is matter of controversy. By the date of the great essay on *Style*—a thing which, however one may differ with some of its conclusions and dispute some of its premisses, is one of the few capital documents on the subject, and which has a skeleton of hard argument as rigid and all-pervading as the iron girder framework of some modern buildings—there cannot be much doubt about the matter. Flaubert's theory, as well as his practice, was matter of common knowledge by that time. But the practice, in Pater's case, must have been known much earlier. *Madame Bovary* was published in 1859, the next year after he went up; *Salammbô*, a more important document for mere style, appeared in the year in which he took his degree. In 1866 the agitation about Mr. Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* set us all exploring through Gautier and Baudelaire to Flaubert. But I do not think that the Flaubertian guidance was at all necessary. That Pater had a gift of style is not a proposition which needs any arguing. That the direction which the gift took was the direction most consonant to that attitude of mind which has been described cannot require very much. The attainment of the "single-instant pleasure" reflects itself in its own expression. You discard the unnecessary; you refuse the conventional; you insist on adequacy and idiosyncrasy. It is the Impressionism of which we have heard so much since; but an Impressionism *à la* Velasquez, not an Impressionism *à la*——I shall leave the reader to fill up the gap with any contemporary name or names that he

may think most suitable. In particular, Pater was almost the first, since the great writers of the seventeenth century, to allow for and to supply suggestion and atmosphere. Even Landor, even De Quincey did not succeed in taking—perhaps did not attempt to take—the inheritance of Sir Thomas Browne as he did. Their agates and cornelians are exquisitely coloured, exquisitely shaped, exquisitely polished: but they are not seen through a medium of shimmering water as, in their different ways, Browne's and his are. And so their magic is less. The immortal and miraculous passage of the *Leonardo* essay about landscape—which everybody religiously and rightly quotes, and which, to those who read it originally, never loses its power of realising phantasm, as Mephistopheles did for Faustus—is but the chief example of this among many. Here Pater was no doubt indebted to his date, in the sense that he could cross Browne with Ruskin, as Landor and De Quincey could not. But the result, like all good crosses, is practically original.

Here also the degradations and the caricatures were obvious and certain. It is not more than two or three weeks since I read a sentence clearly Pateresque in intention. If you read it cursorily or sleepily it sounded and looked rather nice; when the waking and attentive mind came to examine it, there was no real meaning, no real suggestiveness whatever. It was pure *galimatias*: in fact, it would have had some merit if it had been, as it evidently was not, designed parody. But parody proves nothing. You can parody some of the best things and some of the worst; others of both classes are quite

invulnerable to the process. As with the Paterian thought, so with the Paterian expression, the corruptions and offences, though it must needs be that they come, affect the virtue of the thing not at all. Even the thought and the expression themselves are not indissolubly connected; the instance of Coleridge, another great analogue of Pater's and a favourite with him, shows that the thought might have existed independently of the phrase.

The canon of the canon—the interior cabinet of Pater's works—seems to me to consist of the first edition of the *Studies*, *Marius the Epicurean*, and the *Appreciations*. The *Imaginary Portraits*, and *Emerald Uthwart*, with *Gaston de Latour*, are interesting, but a little out of the author's true line, and do not always exhibit his perfect command of style. *Plato and Platonism*, the *Greek Studies*, and the *Miscellaneous Studies* are valuable as side-lights chiefly, and not to be easily applied by those who have not absolutely assimilated the first three: while the *Essays from the Guardian* always remind me of those "pasted-up" proofs, prepared for indefinite expansion and revision, with which some writers are familiar, and which Balzac used—to the great benefit of his readers, and the infinite non-benefit of his publishers and his purse. The omission of the "Conclusion" of the *Studies* proper and original was extremely creditable to Pater as a man, and showed how far he was from that mere attitude of dogged pose which inferior people think so fine. It is also true that *Marius the Epicurean* does supply its place, though, in consequence of the subject, after a fashion which

renders fresh misconceptions not so much probable as certain. The great unwritten page—the *scène à faire* but never *faite*—would have been a new Conclusion embodying that return to the religious influence of his earlier days, which is acknowledged as having taken place; which is really foreshadowed in the original Conclusion itself; but which there is capable of being overlooked as probable or certain by hasty or prejudiced readers. But what is the use of considering the hasty and the prejudiced? The final word in that matter was spoken by Father Abraham long ago in circumstances disastrous to his interlocutor, but of infinite meaning and warning to others. If you cannot construe Pater aright from the *Studies*, the *Marius*, and the *Appreciations*, he himself would do you very little good if he could arise and speak afresh, with whatever considerations and correctives.

For myself, I never have had, and never could have, the slightest hesitation in recommending (though I always feel it rather impertinent to “recommend”) the study of such a writer and such a thinker to everyone who possesses sense and wit. One may sometimes disagree with him, and more often think that his view wants expanding and varying. But in literature (I do not pretend to speak of other kinds of art with technical knowledge) I know no one who supplies at once so much stimulus, and so much practical help, with such a range of illustrative enjoyment into the bargain. And apart from literature—in almost the widest ranges of thought and life—I can see no reason why his method should not be applied with an infinite gain of satisfac-

tion to the soul as well as to the senses; and with no necessary—with no even probable—prospect of disaster, except in cases where disaster was antecedently all but certain.

*The Bookman*, August 1906

## MARGARET OF NAVARRE

### THE HEPTAMÉRON

THE *Heptaméron*, if not equal in narrative vigour and lightness to Boccaccio before and La Fontaine afterwards, is not in the least exposed to the charge of clumsiness of any kind, employs a simple, natural, and sufficiently picturesque vocabulary, avoids all verbiage and roundabout writing, and both in the narratives and in the connecting conversation displays a very considerable advance upon nearly all the writers of the time, except Rabelais, Marot, and Des Périers, in easy command of the vernacular. It is, therefore, not wonderful that there has, at different times (rather less of late years, but that is probably an accident), been a disposition if not to take away from Margaret all the credit of the book, at any rate to give a share of it to others. In so far as this share is attempted to be bestowed on ladies and gentlemen of her Court or family there is very little evidence for it; but in so far as the pen may be thought to have been sometimes held for her by the distinguished men of letters just referred to (there is no reason why Master Francis himself should not have sometimes guided it), and by others only less distinguished, there is considerable internal reason to favour the idea. At all times and in all places—in France perhaps more than anywhere else—kings and queens,

lords and ladies, have found no difficulty—we need not use the harsh Voltairian-Carlylian phrase, and say in getting their literary work “buckwashed”, but in getting it pointed and seasoned, trimmed and ornamented by professional men of letters. The form of the *Heptaméron* lends itself more than any other to such assistance; and while I should imagine that the setting, with its strong colour, both of religiosity and amorousness, is almost wholly Margaret’s work, I should also think it so likely as to be nearly certain that in some at least of the tales the hands of the authors of the *Cymbalum Mundi* and the *Adolescence Clémentine*, of Le Maçon and Brodeau, may have worked at the devising, very likely reshaped and adjusted by the Queen herself, of the actual stories as we have them now.

The book, as we have it, consists of seven complete days of ten novels each, and of an eighth containing two novels only. The fictitious scheme of the setting is somewhat less lugubrious than that of the *Decameron*, but still not without an element of tragedy. On the first of September, “when the hot springs of the Pyrenees begin to enter upon their virtue”, a company of persons of quality assembled at Cauterets, we are told, and abode there three weeks with much profit. But when they tried to return, rain set in with such severity that they thought the Deluge had come again, and they found their roads, especially that to the French side, almost entirely barred by the Gave de Béarn and other rivers. So they scattered in different directions, most of them taking the Spanish side, either along the mountains and across to Roussillon or straight to Barcelona,



and thence home by sea. But a certain widow, named Oisille, made her way, with much loss of men and horses, to the Abbey of Notre Dame de Serrance. Here she was joined by divers gentlemen and ladies, who had had even worse experiences of travel than herself, with bears and brigands, and other evil things, so that one of them, Longarine, had lost her husband, murdered in an affray in one of the cut-throat inns always dear to romance. Besides this disconsolate person and Oisille, the company consisted of a married pair, Hircan and Parlamente; two young cavaliers, Dagoucin and Saffredent; two young ladies, Nomerfide and Ennasuite; Simontault, a cavalier-servant of Parlamente; and Geburon, a knight older and discreeter than the rest of the company except Oisille. These form the party, and it is to be noted that idle and contradictory as all the attempts made to identify them have been (for instance, the most confident interpreters hesitate between Oisille and Parlamente, an aged widow and a youthful wife, for Margaret herself), it is not to be denied that the various parts are kept up with much decision and spirit. Of the men, indeed, Hircan is the only one who has a very decided character, and is represented as fond of his wife, Parlamente, but a decided libertine and of a somewhat rough and ruthless general character—points which have made the interpreters sure that he must be Henry d'Albret. The others, except that Geburon is, as had been said, older than his companions, and that Simontault sighs vainly after Parlamente, are merely walking gentlemen of the times, accomplished enough, but not individual. The women are much more distinct

and show a woman's hand. Oisille is, as our own seventeenth-century ancestors would have said, ancient and sober, very devout, regarded with great respect by the rest of the company, and accepted as a kind of mistress both of the revels and of more serious matters, but still a woman of the world, and content to make only an occasional and mild protest against tolerably free stories and sentiments. Parmente, considerably younger, and though virtuous, not by any means ignorant of or wholly averse to the devotion of Simontault, indulging occasionally in a kind of mild conjugal sparring with her husband, Hircan, but apparently devoted to him, full of religion and romance and refinement at once, is a very charming character, resembling Madame de Sévigné as she may have been in her unknown or hardly known youth, when husband and lovers alike were attracted by the flame of her beauty and charm, only to complain that it froze and did not burn. Longarine is discreetly unhappy for her dead husband, but appears decidedly consolable; Ennasuite is a haughty damsel, disdainful of poor folk; and Nomerfide is a pure madcap, a Catherine Seyton of the generation before Catherine herself, the feminine Dioneo of the party, and, if a little too free-spoken for prudish modern taste, a very delightful girl.

Now when this good company had assembled at Serrance and told each other their misadventures, the waters on inquiry seemed to be out more widely and more dangerously than before, so that it was impossible to think of going farther for the time. They deliberated accordingly how they should employ themselves, and,

after allowing, on the proposal of Oisille, an ample space for sacred exercises, they resolved that every day, after dinner and an interval, they should assemble in a meadow on the bank of the Gave at midday and tell stories. The device is carried out with such success that the monks steal behind the hedges to hear them, and an occasional postponement of vespers takes place. Simontault begins, and the system of tale-telling goes round on the usual plan of each speaker naming him or her who shall follow. It should be observed that no general subject is, as in the *Decameron*, prescribed to the speakers of each day, though, as a matter of course, one subject often suggests another of not dissimilar kind. Nor is there the Decameronic arrangement of the "king". Between the stories, and also between the days, there is often a good deal of conversation, in which the divers characters, as given above, are carried out with a minuteness very different from the chief Italian original.

From what has been said already, it will be readily perceived that the novels, or rather their subjects, are not very easy to class in any rationalised order. The great majority, if they do not answer exactly to the old title of *Les Histoires des Amants Fortunés*, are devoted to the eternal subject of the tricks played by wives to the disadvantage of husbands, by husbands to the disadvantage of wives, and sometimes by lovers to the disadvantage of both. "Subtilité" is a frequent word in the titles, and it corresponds to a real thing. Another large division, trenching somewhat upon the first, is composed of stories to the discredit of the monks (some-

thing, though less, is said against the secular clergy), and especially of the Cordeliers or Franciscans, an Order who, for their coarse immorality and their brutal antipathy to learning, were the special black (or rather grey) beasts of the literary reformers of the time. In a considerable number there are references to actual personages of the time—references which stand on a very different footing of identification from the puerile guessings at the personality of the interlocutors so often referred to. Sometimes these references are avowed, “Un des muletiers de la Reine de Navarre”, “Le Roi François montre sa générosité”, “Un Président de Grenoble”, “Une femme d’Alençon”, and so forth. At other times the reference is somewhat more covert, but hardly to be doubted, as in the remarkable story of a “great Prince” (obviously Francis himself) who used on his journeyings to and from an assignation of a very illegitimate character, to turn into a church and piously pursue his devotions. There are a few curious stories in which amatory matters play only a subordinate part or none at all, though it must be confessed that this last is a rare thing. Some are mere anecdote plays on words (sometimes pretty free, and then generally told by Nomerfide), or quasi-historical, such as that already noticed of the generosity of Francis to a traitor, or deal with remarkable trials and crimes, or merely miscellaneous matters, the best of the last class being the capital “Bonne invention pour chasser le lutin”.

In so large a number of stories with so great a variety of subjects, it naturally cannot but be the case that there is a considerable diversity of tone. But that

peculiarity at which we have glanced more than once, the combination of voluptuous passion with passionate regret and a mystical devotion, is seldom absent for long together. The general note, indeed, of the *Heptameron* is given by more than one passage in Brantôme—at greatest length by one which Sainte-Beuve has rightly quoted, at the same time and also rightly rebuking the sceptical Abbé's determination to see in it little more than a piece of *précieuse* mannerliness (though, indeed, the *Précieuses* were not yet). Yet even Sainte-Beuve has scarcely pointed out quite strongly enough how entirely this is the keynote of all Margaret's work, and especially of the *Heptaméron*. The story therefore may be worth telling again, though it may be found in the "Cinquième Discours" of the *Vies des Dames Galantes*.

Brantôme's brother, not yet a captain in the army, but a student travelling in Italy, had in sojourning at Ferrara, when Renée of France was Duchess, fallen in love with a certain Mademoiselle de la Roche. For love of him she had returned to France, and, visiting his own country of Gascony, had attached herself to the Court of Margaret, where she had died. And it happened that Bourdeilles, six months afterwards, and having forgotten all about his dead love, came to Pau and went to pay his respects to the Queen. He met her coming back from vespers, and she greeted him graciously, and they talked of this matter and of that. But, as they walked together hither and thither, the Queen drew him, without cause shown, into the church she had just left, where Mademoiselle de la Roche was

buried. "Cousin," said she, "do you feel nothing stirring beneath you and under your feet?" But he said, "Nothing, Madame." "Think, cousin," then said she once again. But he said, "Madame, I have thought well, but I feel nought; for under me there is but a stone, hard and firmly set." "Now do I tell you," said the Queen, leaving him no longer at study, "that you are above the tomb and the body of Mademoiselle de la Roche, who is buried beneath you, and whom you loved so much in her life-time. And since our souls have sense after our death, it cannot be but that this faithful one, dead so lately, felt your presence as soon as you came near her; and if you have not perceived it, because of the thickness of the tomb, doubt not that none the less she felt it. And forasmuch as it is a pious work to make memory of the dead, and notably of those whom we loved, I pray you give her a *pater* and an *ave*, and likewise a *de profundis*, and pour out holy water. So shall you make acquist of the name of a right faithful lover and a good Christian." And she left him that he might do this.

Brantôme (though he had an admiration for Margaret, whose lady of honour his grandmother had been, and who, according to the Bourdeilles tradition, composed her novels in travelling) thought this a pretty fashion of converse. "Voilà," he says, "l'opinion de cette bonne princesse; laquelle la tenait plus par gentillesse et par forme de devis que par créance à mon avis." Sainte-Beuve, on the contrary, and with better reason, sees in it faith, graciousness, feminine delicacy, and piety at once. No doubt; but there is something more

than this, and that something more is what we are in search of, and what we shall find, now in one way, now in another, throughout the book: something whereof the sentiment of Donne's famous thoughts on the old lover's ghost, on the blanched bone with its circlet of golden tresses, is the best known instance in English. The madcap Nomerfide indeed lays it down, that "the meditation of death cools the heart not a little". But her more experienced companions know better. The worse side of this Renaissance peculiarity is told in the last tale, a rather ghastly story of monkish corruption; its lighter side appears in the story, already referred to, of the "Grand Prince" and his pious devotions on the way to not particularly pious occupation. But touches of the more poetical and romantic effects of it are all over the book. It is to be found in the story of the gentleman who forsook the world because of his beloved's cruelty, whereat she repenting did likewise ("he had much better have thrown away his cowl and married her", quoth the practical Nomerfide); in that of the wife who, to obtain freedom of living with her paramour, actually allowed herself to be buried; in that (very characteristic of the time, especially for the touch of farce in it) of the unlucky person to whom phlebotomy and love together were fatal; and in not a few others, while it emerges in casual phrases of the intermediate conversations and of the stories themselves, even when it is not to be detected in the general character of the subjects.

And thus we can pretty well decide what is the most interesting and important part of the whole subject.

The question, What is the special virtue of the *Hep-taméron*? I have myself little hesitation in answering. There is no book, in prose and of so early a date, which shows to me the characteristic of the time, as it influenced the two great literary nations of Europe, so distinctly as this book of Margaret of Angoulême. Take it as a book of Court gossip, and it is rather less interesting than most books of Court gossip, which is saying much. Take it as the performance of a single person, and you are confronted with the difficulty that it is quite unlike that other person's more certain works, and that it is in all probability a joint affair. Take its separate stories, and, with rare exceptions, they are not of the first order of interest, or even of the second. But separate the individual purport of these stories from the general colour or tone of them; take this general colour or tone in connection with the tenor of the intermediate conversations, which form so striking a characteristic of the book, and something quite different appears. It is that same peculiarity which appears in places and persons and things so different as Spenser, as the poetry of the Pléiade, as Montaigne, as Raleigh, as Donne, as the group of singers known as the Caroline poets. It is a peculiarity which has shown itself in different forms at different times, but never in such vigour and precision as at this time. It combines a profound and certainly sincere—almost severe—religiosity with a very vigorous practice of some things which the religion it professes does not at all countenance. It has an almost morbidly pronounced simultaneous sense of the joys and the sorrows of human life, the enjoyment



of the joys being perfectly frank, and the feeling of the sorrows not in the least sentimental. It unites a great general refinement of thought, manners, opinion, with an almost astonishing occasional coarseness of opinion, manners, thought. The prevailing note in it is a profound *mélancholy* mixed with flashes and intervals of a no less profound delight. There is in it the sense of death, to a strange and, at first sight, almost unintelligible extent. Only when one remembers the long night of the religious wars which was just about to fall on France—just as after Spenser, Puritan as he was, after Carew and Herrick still more, a night of a similar character was about to fall on England—does the real reason of this singular idiosyncrasy appear. The company of the *Heptaméron* are the latest representatives, at first hand, and with no deliberate purpose of presentment, of the medieval conception of gentlemen and ladies who fleeted the time goldenly. They are not themselves any longer medieval; they have been taught modern ways; they have a kind of uneasy sense (even though one and another of themselves may now and then flout the idea) of the importance of other classes, even of some duty on their own part towards other classes. Their piety is a very little deliberate, their voluptuous indulgence has a grain of conscience in it and behind it, which distinguishes it not less from the frank indulgence of a Greek or a Roman than from the still franker naïveté of purely medieval art, from the child-like, almost paradisiac, innocence of the Bellicents and Nicolettes and of the daughter of the great Soldan Hugh in that wonderful serio-comic *chanson* of the

*Voyage à Constantinople.* The mark of modernity is on them, and yet they are so little conscious of it, and so perfectly free from even the slightest touch of at least its anti-religious influence. Nobody, not even Hircan, the Grammont of the sixteenth century; not even Nomerfide, the Miss Notable of her day and society; not even the haughty lady Ennasuite, who wonders whether common folk can be supposed to have like passions with us, feels the abundant religious services and the periods of meditation unconscionable or tiresome.

And so we have here three notes constantly sounding together or in immediate sequence. There is the passion of that exquisite rondeau of Marot's, which some will have, perhaps not impossibly, to refer to Margaret herself—

En la baisant m'a dit: "Amy sans blasme,  
Ce seul baiser, qui deux bouches embasme,  
Les arrhes sont du bien tant espéré",  
Ce mot elle a doucement proféré,  
Pensant du tout apaiser ma grand' flamme.  
Mais le mien cœur adonc plus elle enflamme,  
Car son alaine odorant plus que basme  
Souffloit le feu qu'Amour m'a préparé,  
En la baisant.

Bref, mon esprit, sans congnoissance d'âme,  
Vivoit alors sur la bouche à ma dame,  
Dont se mouroit le corps enamouré;  
Et si la lèvre eust guères demouré  
Contre la mienne, elle m'eust succé l'âme,  
En la baisant.

There is the devout meditation of Oisille, and that

familiarity with the Scriptures which, as Hircan himself says, "I trow we all read and know". And then there is the note given by two other curious stories of Brantôme. One tells how the Queen of Navarre watched earnestly for hours by the bedside of a dying maid of honour, that she might see whether the parting of the soul was a visible fact or not. The second tells how when some talked before her of the joys of heaven, she sighed and said, "Well, I know that this is true; but we dwell so long dead underground before we arise thither". There, in a few words, is the secret of the *Heptaméron*: the fear of God, the sense of death, the voluptuous longing and voluptuous regret for the good things of life and love that pass away.

LONDON, October 1892

## MARMONTEL'S MORAL TALES

THE enemies of Sainte-Beuve were rather fond of saying that he had a dislike to genius of the highest order, insinuating, if they did not openly add, that this dislike was due to jealousy, and to that sense of creative impotence which is frequently urged against critics. The charge was unjust; and it would probably never have been made if the extreme Hugolaters had not been wroth at a real or supposed defection from their idol. But it would no doubt be possible for an ingenious and not too scrupulous advocate to select and twist texts from Sainte-Beuve in favour of the accusation. One of these, as it happens, opens the *Causerie* on the author of those *Contes Moraux*, some of which—in their old English dress a little brushed up and set straight—are now once more put before English readers. “Rien ne m’est pénible,” wrote the critic rather more than forty years ago, “comme de voir le dédain avec lequel on traite souvent des écrivains recommandables et distingués du second ordre, comme s’il n’y avait place que pour ceux du premier.” This indeed is by no means the same thing as intimating a distaste for *ceux du premier*; but it is quite capable of being wrenched or garbled into something like it.

Sainte-Beuve, however, does not proceed to make a very strong fight for Marmontel, and even proposes that posterity shall not be asked to read anything of him

but his *Memoirs*, with a *très petit nombre* of his *Tales*. But with Sainte-Beuve, at least in his later days, the biographical interest of literature got a little the better of the purely literary; and it must be admitted that the biographical interest of Marmontel's *Memoirs* is extraordinarily high. His sketch of his youth, of his good mother and grandmother; of the ravishingly beautiful *cure's* nieces, muleteer's daughters, and so forth who charmed or soothed his early years; of the angelic Mlle B., who, when he fell sick for calf-love of her, was brought to his bedside, and though behaving with the most perfect modesty, used language quite different from the unfeeling remarks of Miss Barbara Allen of Scarlet Town in similar circumstances:—all these, though not unpleasant to read, are a little commonplace and usual. His further sketch of his real "loving season"—when celebrated actresses and mistresses of redoubted marshals competed for him, carried him off into the depths of Champagne, and, reckless at once of propriety and the feelings of their titular adorers, showered upon him the gifts of Bacchus and Venus together—has a little coxcombry and a little mawkishness; while his unvarying distribution of the *beau rôle* to himself (though, to tell the truth, there is no contrary and some confirmatory evidence) becomes at last slightly fatiguing. One remembers Carlyle's irreverent apostrophe to Marmontel's greater contemporary: "*Be virtuous, in the name of the Devil and his grandmother, and have done with it.*"

Nevertheless these things make an interesting story, admirably told; and the best part remains to be mentioned. Hardly anything better exists, even in that

century of admirable Memoirs, than Marmontel's accounts of the dinners and suppers at the house of Madame Geoffrin, "the nursing-mother of the philosophers". Nothing better of its own kind exists than the gallery of portraits—Madame Geoffrin herself, Made-moiselle de l'Espinasse, the incomparable in her way, d'Alembert, Marivaux, Helvétius, Thomas, Galiani, and many others down to Panard and Gallet—with which he has illustrated these accounts. As he had with a very great deal of intelligence very little ill-nature, Caylus is almost the only person of whom he speaks with distinct harshness; and as he wrote, though with all his faculties in perfection, long enough afterwards to have his objects defined in "the firm perspective of the past", these portraits are of the greatest value. Indeed, students of some reading will know that whenever anything appears in later literature about any of these personages, Marmontel's account is sure to occupy a prominent place among the sources of information. He knew; he was fairly impartial; and he had an admirable descriptive pen. Of this last, one of the best examples is his picture of his own sufferings in the Bastille, where—poor persecuted victim of tyranny!—after despatching a very respectable repast, consisting of haricot *purée*, a dish of the said haricots, and a famous plate of cod *à la provençale*, with excellent bread and a bottle of decent wine, he discovered that this was intended for his servant, who accordingly came in for the soup, slice of beef, leg of capon, fried artichokes, spinach, pears, grapes, old Burgundy, and Mocha coffee, which came a little later, and were intended for the victim himself.

For this was the way the prisoners clanked their chains, rustled their straw, and munched their mouldy loaf (as generation after generation of Republican fiction has represented them) in the dungeons of the Bastille.

I cannot, however, say that I myself should base Marmontel's claims by any means so exclusively upon the *Mémoires* as Sainte-Beuve—though it is true he makes a few reserves in the later part of his essay—seems here disposed to do. We shall have something to say to his work in detail presently, and a good deal to say about the *Contes Moraux*. But before coming to these things, or to a sketch of the outward course of his life, it may be well to say a few words about his claims generally.

Marmontel, then, is a very eminent example of the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a school: the chief of which respectively are that the affiliation "pushes" the scholar during his life, and keeps him back after his death. In the eighteenth century readers were naturally eager to see what an able, active, and well-reputed exponent of the *philosophe* movement had to say for himself and for it, while the actual battle was going on. That battle is long ago lost and won, in the particular conditions, on the particular field; and looking backwards, posterity is satisfied with considering it only in the actions of its very greatest chiefs and champions. How shall a time, which it must be suspected does not very actively busy itself with, though it still publishes and buys, the works of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot, spare attention for Marmontel?

Yet for the real student, these secondary writers,

these generals of corps, or even of division, have, as they had for Sainte-Beuve, a peculiar interest. We see the movement, the drift, the line in them more clearly than in their betters, precisely because it is less mingled with and distorted by any intense personal idiosyncrasy. They are not distractingly great nor distracted by their own greatness; they are clear, if limited, comprehensible from beginning to end. The man of genius, being never merely, is never quite of his time: the man of talent is. And Marmontel was a man of very remarkable talent indeed; not a good poet, but an excellent prose writer; a man of great wit, of acute (sometimes almost too acute) reasoning faculty, of some imagination, of lore considerable for his time and rather widely ranging. Nor perhaps is there any better example of that peculiar type of men of letters of whom the eighteenth century was the special nurse—the type to which “society” is an indispensable condition of comfort, and almost of existence. He made a very respectable hermit (with a wife and children) in his latest years, and must have lived a good deal alone in his earliest. But for the best part of half a century he seems to have been hardly ever alone; he even did his Grub Street days in company with a friend and the friend's mistress.

Very good reading as the *Memoirs* are, it would require, as with most Memoirs of the time, considerable pains and skill to riddle out from them an exact life-history of their author, with dates and facts all in order. Jean François Marmontel was born at Bort, in the Limousin, on July 11, 1723. His family was in humble circumstances (his father, though he does not say so,



seems to have been a tailor), and like so many men of letters in France at the time, he owed his education to the Jesuits, whose school at Mauriac he attended. An attempt was made to put him into trade, but he resisted, and succeeded in maintaining himself, in a rather Scotch fashion, during a further course of study at Clermont, by taking pupils. Then his father died, and the condition of the family was less promising than ever. Marmontel transferred himself to Toulouse, where the Jesuits would fain have reaped what they had sown, by attracting him to their order: but this, though he actually wore the ecclesiastical habit for some time without taking vows, did not tempt him, and though still very young, he obtained work as a kind of assistant professor. He competed at the famous Floral Games for poetic prizes, and being defeated, sent his production to Voltaire. It was the constant policy of that astute person to be liberal of praise to young rising men of letters; and Marmontel, receiving a flattering reply, was enrolled for the patriarch's lifetime in the somewhat unsacred band of his disciples and defenders. The Floral Games themselves were at length kind to him, while the Montauban Academy bestowed upon him a silver lyre, which, turned into money, took him to Paris, thereby anticipating the truth of Joubert's dictum, that *la lyre est un instrument ailé*. It could, however, like a limited talisman, do no more: and Marmontel, who had come up with a translation of *The Rape of the Lock* and some other things in his pocket, at first had some acquaintance with the joys of the Parisian Grub Street. Next year, however, he obtained an Academic prize, with a

poem on Louis XIV and his successor, and Voltaire procured for him from the courtiers a literal "hat full of money" for copies of it. He was equally lucky the year after with a variation of the same subject. It had been Glory before, it was Clemency now. These productions paid much better than the *Observateur Littéraire*, a critical journal which he started almost immediately on his arrival, and which ran for a score or two of numbers. But money was far from plentiful: and part of what he did get was in bills, which he could only turn into cash by taking the value in sugar, and selling it—an odd detail.

The theatre has for nearly three centuries at least been the almost invariable resort of a rising young French man of letters, and it was especially certain to be so in the case of a *protégé* of Voltaire. Marmontel had not been long in Paris when he betook himself to it, helping his success by the orthodox method of making love to leading actresses. This he did to such an extent, that Marshal Saxe, rather a dangerous person to meddle with, complained that the youngster carried off all his favourites. In the five years from 1748 to 1753 he wrote as many tragedies. *Denys le Tyran*, the first, and *Aristomène*, the second, were great hits: but *Cléopâtre*, *Les Héraclides*, and *Egyptus* were damned—in the first case, it was said, owing to the too ingenious idea of getting the famous mechanic Vaucanson to make an asp that hissed. "I agree with the asp", said somebody, and the fate of the piece was sealed; while the misfortune of another is said to have been due to the chief actress, who had taken more than was good for her. Madame de

Pompadour, however, was kinder than the Tragic Muse. From 1753 onwards she obtained for Marmontel divers places: and in 1758 he received the direction of the *Mercure de France*, the official literary journal. It was here that the *Tales* we now republish in an English dress first appeared. But Marmontel, whose course since his early hardships had been one of increasing prosperity, now got into a little trouble. A satire, apparently not his own, on a great man, the Duc d'Aumont, who was rather a frequent butt of the wits, sent him to the Bastille to undergo the very short and very light imprisonment which he has recorded in his *Memoirs*, and (a more serious matter) caused the *Mercure* to be taken away from him.

A visit to the Bastille was something without which the education of a French man of letters at this time was incomplete. In 1763 Marmontel became an Academician. But the final seal was not put on his reputation till the Sorbonne was good enough to pass censure on *Bélisaire* for its advocacy of toleration. He had long been enrolled among the *philosophes*, and had contributed a great number of articles to the *Encyclopédie*; but a condemnation by the Sorbonne was equivalent to a Grand Cross of the Legion of Philosophic Honour. The Works contain a large assortment of letters to and from distinguished persons on the subject of the book. "Catherine" (so she signs herself) of Russia professes herself enchanted with it; King Stanislaus of Poland indulges in moral ecstasies; the Crown Prince of Sweden plucks all the flowers of rhetoric to adorn the brow of the illustrious condemned. In fact, this extremely dull little

book—one of the least good of the numerous imitations of *Télémaque*, and quite unworthy of its author's real talents—may be said to have completed for him the literary fame which the *Contes Moraux* far more deservedly began. From this time forward he was in the first flight of the second rank of French men of letters: while after the deaths of Voltaire and Rousseau in 1778, and in 1783 of d'Alembert, whom he succeeded as perpetual secretary of the Academy, there could hardly be said to be anyone except Diderot who was distinctly his superior, while Diderot himself died in 1784. He had been appointed in 1771 historiographer-royal of France, and in the very year of Voltaire's death he published *Les Incas*, a book of the same class as *Bélisaire* but better. In 1786 he was made Professor of History in the newly established Lycée, and next year he collected his Encyclopedia articles under the title of *Éléments de Littérature*. He had married in 1778, rather late, after a not too regular youth; but appears to have been an enthusiastic husband and an affectionate father. His wife was a niece of the Abbé Morellet, and much younger than her husband, but seems to have reciprocated his enthusiasm.

Marmontel, who was one of the youngest of the Encyclopedists, was not a very old man at the outbreak of the Revolution; but like nearly all his contemporaries, he did not relish the whirlwind any the more for having helped to sow the wind. Still, he appears to have behaved very creditably, and there is positive testimony that at an electoral meeting in 1789 itself he had the courage to vote *alone* against headlong reform. He lost

most of his appointments, but retiring early from Paris, he was not exposed to any danger, and lived quietly in Normandy, first near Evreux, then near Gaillon. When the Council of Ancients was constituted he was elected to it by his department (the Eure), and was in some danger at the minor revolution of Fructidor. But nothing happened to him, and he died at his Norman home on the very last day of 1799, though not, as Sainte-Beuve, taking the obviously wrong side of a celebrated dispute, says, "on the very eve of the nineteenth century".

Had it been so, the thing would have been appropriate enough: for Marmontel was a very incarnation of the eighteenth century as it developed itself in France, and might fitly have passed with it. It is indeed very difficult to think of any French writer in whom its merits, unobscured by any lack of talent, and its defects, unmasked by any presence of genius, appear so clearly and characteristically. He had, as these *Tales* will show, abundance of the *esprit* which was more than any single quality its dominating note: and it is perfectly true that, according to a shrewd remark of Villemain's, he "abused this *esprit* so as to make systematic mistakes"; yet this of itself was the eighteenth century all over. The astonishing dicta which meet us side by side with very similar ones in the *Éléments de Littérature*; the grave apology, wholly untinged by humour, for Homer's presentation of Nausicaa by observing that "it was not yet improper for a princess to wash her father's clothes"; the, as they seem to us, wearisome and cumbrous attempts to read moral, political, and religious lessons into historical

fiction in *Bélisaire* and *Les Incas*, must be taken with, not apart from, the lightness and brightness of the demure mischief frequent in the *Contes Moraux*. In the very tales themselves we shall misunderstand Marmontel and his age if we suppose the counsels to bad mothers to be in the least degree less sincere than the very dubious examples given to bad wives. Even Frenchmen have been more doubtful of the propriety of the title "*Moral Tales*" than was quite necessary. Marmontel was no more an insincere moralist than Pope, whose *Rape of the Lock* he, as has been said, translated, the version beginning with the very characteristic couplet—

D'une jeune Beauté je chante la colère,  
Et les graves effets d'une offense légère.

We shall not, indeed, appreciate Marmontel in the least as he ought to be appreciated, if we do not bear this moral purpose in mind: and in order to do this it is necessary to pay some slight attention to the divisions of his work which may seem most remote from the apparent trifles that form the staple of this book. The seeming ponderous collection of *Leçons d'un Père*, for instance, consisting of discourses on Grammar, Logic, Metaphysics, and Morals, is illustrated and lightened by a good-tempered and genial philosophy, which exhibits the best side of the eighteenth-century construction of that word. The *Grammar* may seem not up to modern conceptions of philology and phonetics; the *Logic* (though with the Port Royalists before him, Marmontel could not go very wrong) a little superficial; the *Metaphysics* too much limited to Locke; the *Ethics*

too practical and hortatory. But two phrases which I have picked up in quite different parts of his later work, "Le Beau moral est une source de voluptés", and "Mille vertus sont l'ouvrage de la raison soumise à la nécessité", at once put his attitude and the attitude of the better part of his contemporaries in a nutshell, and supply two very good texts for its vindication. The first distinguishes it as sharply from the point of view of the ages which regard morality from the religious side, as from that of those which either do not feel any special pleasure in moral beauty, or direct their aesthetic hedonism to a large number of other sources of pleasure as well. The second expresses the intensely practical character of the day, and its indifference to transcendental considerations. To those who hold that

Because right is right, to follow right  
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence,

the doctrine that virtue is the result of reason adjusting itself to the pressure of circumstance must seem a little mean and paltry. And it is always, of course, open to the adversary to urge that with all its talk about virtue, the eighteenth century, and especially the French eighteenth century, was amazingly tolerant of vice. To which no answer is possible but the old one, that the vices and virtues of most times are perhaps more nearly constant in amount than we think.

The Works are pretty voluminous, though perhaps not extraordinarily so, when it is remembered that Marmontel's literary life extended over nearly sixty years, and that he had no occupation, except literature,

that can have taken up much of his time. They fill, in the compactest edition, about five thousand pages, of perhaps five hundred words each; and there are few kinds of secular writing which are not represented in them. Besides the poems, the plays, the memoirs, the novels, the Encyclopedia articles (the latter a most formidable contingent, giving perhaps a fifth of the whole), and the *Tales*, there is a long and well-written *Histoire de la Régence du Duc d'Orléans*, the *Leçons d'un Père à ses Enfants* above referred to, a prose translation of the *Pharsalia*, a certain number of miscellaneous essays and academic discourses, and a few letters. These latter, by the way, are, for a man of Marmontel's time, habits, and society, very rare: and considering the ardour with which rummages into this period have recently been pursued in France, it is odd that more have not appeared.

Nobody need trouble himself much about Marmontel as a poet. The cruel but not unjust description of almost all French and much English verse in his time, that it is "prose cut into lengths", is certainly justified in his case. He had not even the gift of light poetry, which was possessed by many of his contemporaries, though his posthumous attempt in verse, light in more senses than one, *La Neuvaïne de Cythère* (which does not figure in his collected works), is perhaps rightly credited with superior elegance to most other things of his. But his verse has the qualities which the age demanded of it—correctness, polish, craftsmanship up to a certain point. It was not for nothing that Marmontel's very first published work was that translation of Pope which has been noticed. The Popian conception of poetry was his



sincerely and thoroughly, though it is fair to say that he was never a precisian of the school of Boileau. In his criticism, as we shall see when we come to it, he even blasphemed the "legislator of Parnassus", and was rebuked therefor by Voltaire with good-humoured seriousness; but his practice rather belied his theory. The *Ode on the Battle of Fontenoy* would, if any Englishman cared to take the trouble, give nearly as excellent a subject for burlesque as Boileau's own on the *Taking of Namur* gave to Prior; those on the *Charms of Study* and the *Selfishness of a False Philosophy*, the verse "discourses" on Eloquence, History, and what not, announce by their very titles the sort of thing that they are going to give, and give it. His pen, often admirably light and graceful in the prose of these *Tales*, moves slowly and heavily in trifling verse. He had a more just value than most of his contemporaries for the marvellous versification of the *chansonnier* Panard, whom he knew, and from whose wig-box (the poet's storehouse of his verses, as Campbell's slippers were of his money) he used to extract songs for the *Mercure*. But when he tried Panard's rhythms, all grace went out of them. He attempted to write epigrams against Piron, nearly the greatest of all epigrammatists, with disastrous results. As for his tragedies, he added in his old age to those mentioned (*Egyptus*, as damned the first night, was not reprinted) another, *Numitor*, as to which Sainte-Beuve contents himself with scornfully repeating the title. These also are exactly what might be expected. Out of Voltaire and Crébillon the Elder, French eighteenth-century tragedy permits itself to be read in few cases:

and Marmontel's efforts are not among the more engaging minority. He was considerably more successful as a playwright with operas, regular and comic (produced in some numbers, and very fair of their kind), to the music of Rameau, Grétry, Piccinni, and others. Nor should it be omitted that in the great Gluck v. Piccinni battle he took the side of his collaborator vigorously, and even wrote in defence of Piccinni a poem entitled *Polymnie*, which is only partly preserved. But the opera-libretto is not very often readable by posterity with vivid enjoyment.

Of Marmontel as a literary critic, something more special must be said. There is merit even in the early and unsuccessful pages of the *Observateur*; the *Essai sur les Romans* is often good; and so are the academic discourses and other critical miscellanies. But his critical stronghold is the *Éléments de Littérature*. It is, as has been already mentioned, a collection of his articles on the subject in the great *Encyclopédie*, reinforced by some papers on subjects which, in the work presided over by Diderot and d'Alembert, happened to have been assigned to others, and introduced by a really remarkable essay on Taste, where the characteristic oddities above cited are found, side by side with excellent things. Not many readers of this extensive and curious book, probably, have read it without admiration, despite its peculiarities: but of late years not many have read it at all. I think the perusal would do something to convince impartial judges of some experience that the sneer implied in the description of Marmontel as "universel et médiocre", which has been given by M. Lan-

son, the latest historian of French literature, is unjust and a little shallow. Marmontel, if not universal, is certainly pretty versatile: but his manner of exhibiting this division of his versatility at least is the reverse of mediocre. Some fashionable follies about things "low", things "barbarous", and so forth, appear: and it is impossible not to be amused at others, such as the grave demonstration by the most elaborate reasons (which amount in effect to nothing but a restatement of the facts) why the English are a poetical people. But no man, not even the most superhuman genius, escapes the note and mark of his own time entirely: and the exceptional thing about Marmontel is that he so often and so constantly does escape that note and mark when it is bad. It is much, very much, for a typical son of the French eighteenth century (even if, as is probable, he is not without indebtedness to certain criticisms of Fénelon) to admit that the great writers of the seventeenth century had *épuré et appauvri* the language of Marot and Montaigne. It is still more for him—fifty years and more before Sainte-Beuve vindicated Ronsard from the almost unintelligible contempt into which that great poet had been thrown by the efforts of Malherbe and Boileau—to dare to produce examples of lyrical grace and grandeur from the despised chief of the *Pléiade*. But it may be said that this is only the usual revolt of tolerably brisk and intelligent young critics against the dominant teaching of their day. In the first place, Marmontel was not so very young when he originally wrote these things: and was not young at all when he collected and arranged them into a regular

literary manual. In the second, the thing was so little usual in his time that all the industry and ingenuity of those who have occupied themselves in seeking out "Romantics before Romanticism" would be puzzled to find another example of Marmontel's eminence in Marmontel's day.

And the book has much more merit than this of mere revolt or resipiscence. For all its alphabetic and academic form (relieved, it should be said, by a good many capital anecdotes), for all the old-fashioned air which the separate handling of "The Amusing", "The Pathetic", "Harangues", "Situation", "Exordiums", "Poetical Invention", and so forth may throw over it—the clearness and definition which this scheme imparts, though they may be now and then pushed too far, give the book many advantages over the discursive aesthetics of later times. And quite independently of its form, there are two things which must strike every competent reader, and which between them are the touchstone of competent critical writing. In the first place, Marmontel *knows*: and there are so many critics who speak without knowing! Here also, no doubt, he has limitations. He knew little or nothing of medieval literature: and to this day the critics of his country (perhaps of all countries) do not know very much of it. He was not very widely read in foreign literature; and was it not only the other day that no less a critic than M. Jules Lemaître professed himself, without much or any shame, unable to read Shakespeare in the original? Marmontel could read Shakespeare in the original: he had, as we have seen, translated Pope very early: and

he probably knew more of English literature, at least as it was then known, than Englishmen themselves, than all but a very few Frenchmen of his day. If *Ossian* took him in, it took in all Europe (as to attraction, that is to say, not authenticity), and most good critics now agree that, with all the doctoring and adulteration, there is the real "Celtic vague" in Macpherson's queer jumble of reminiscence and forgery and simple imitation. The European literary languages, among which Germany then hardly counted, he knew well, while he seems to have known something even of German; and he was really familiar with his classics. Even of Greek he was certainly not ignorant, while I fancy that his familiarity with Latin literature would have enabled him to put to confusion the average modern philological scholar. And he used all this knowledge to supply his book with a mass of illustrative quotation which, for absence of mere parade, and for genuine illumination and point, leaves that of even the best literary manuals, as a rule, very far behind.

Yet even this would not put Marmontel nearly so high as he at present deserves to stand, were his knowledge not accompanied by a shrewdness and justness of thought and expression which rarely fail, unless they are mastered by some conventional delusion, and which not unfrequently enable him to get the better of that. Even in the *Essai sur le Goût* (and there is no truer commonplace than that the mere taste of one time is almost certain to be in part at least distasteful to any other), this acute and active mind, this ready and exact language, will extort admiration from any fair judge.

And it would be possible to extract from Marmontel a body of general literary axioms and aphorisms which would be very surprising if they were the work of a mediocre person: and which, as Sainte-Beuve says, with a point of irony pleasantly restrained to a single word, "*la jeunesse non orgueilleuse*" among critics of all times, and not least of this time, may read with a great deal of advantage. It is true that there is not much paradox in him, and there are some people who seem to think that without a "pair o' dowgs", as the Ettrick Shepherd calls it, it is impossible that criticism can deserve applause or escape contempt. The doctrine is at least a comfortable one, for paradox requires no knowledge, no particular shrewdness of thought, and absolutely no justness in it. So that this kind of *jeunesse orgueilleuse* (or *vieillesse frivole*, as the case may be) will be quite right in despising Marmontel, whose grapes are sour to it.

*Bélisaire* and *Les Incas* concern us here chiefly in that they approach the kind if not the style of the *Contes Moraux* themselves. Contemporaries, indeed (it cannot be said that posterity has troubled itself much about them, save for a time as school-books), were somewhat divided as to the name by which they ought to be called. Some regarded them as novels with a *philosophe* purpose for aim, and a sort of historical basis for starting-point—which is indeed the most philosophical way of looking at them. Others considered them as history with a few fanciful developments, and this to a certain extent they are: for Marmontel lacked neither knowledge, nor intelligence, nor industry. He only lacked, as

most of his contemporaries did till Gibbon taught them, the historic sense—that intangible, indefinable, but still unmistakable and indispensable quality which, for instance, will tell a man not to put the sentiments of Marcus Aurelius, still less those of Cicero, in the mouths of the contemporaries of Justinian. Yet a third class bestowed upon both the generally unlucky appellation of “prose poem”. This in point of style they deserve well enough, abounding as they do in rhetorical and quasi-lyrical bursts and apostrophes, which in *Les Incas* take the form of regular choruses. This bastard style has always had a considerable attraction for the French, and however great the influence of Fénelon and others was on Marmontel, he pretty certainly passed it on to others again, especially to Chateaubriand, whose *Martyrs* is the masterpiece of the kind. It is, however, always a *rococo* and second-rate kind, neither one thing nor the other, and constantly making the reader wish that the author would make up his mind whether he is going to write poetry or prose in manner, fiction, history, or doctrine in matter. The really considerable narrative gifts which, as the present book will show, Marmontel possessed, have very little chance of appearing in this style: though it must be confessed that the mania for a kind of preaching which inspires these two once famous books is hardly less apparent in the *Tales* themselves, and justifies the application to them of the epithet Moral.

Enough, I think, and not too much, I hope, has now been said about Marmontel generally: and we may come to the *Contes Moraux* themselves. Their publication,

which extended in all over more than thirty years, though none of the latest are included in this collection, began in the *Mercure*, but not under Marmontel's own editorship. Before he himself received the patent—a term, however, rather inadequate to express the French *privilège*, inasmuch as the latter was revocable at pleasure, and expired with the death of the holder—he had induced Madame de Pompadour to give it to an indigent man of letters named Boissy, at whose death only he himself received it, giving up his former place of Secretary of Public Buildings. Boissy was not much skilled in the management of periodicals: and Marmontel, after getting him the place, helped him with various contributions, of which these *Contes Moraux* were the chief. They were extremely popular at the time; and their popularity was helped by their subsequent appearance in volume-form with plates by Moreau *le jeune*. This popularity spread to other countries with great rapidity, and they were soon translated into most European languages. But what is rather curious, though perhaps not entirely unexampled, is that the external popularity distinctly outdid and outlasted the home vogue. Perhaps the inclusion of the *Contes* in the general editions of Marmontel's works, accounts for their not having been very frequently reprinted by themselves after the date (1786) of the first of these collections. But this would hardly account for the scant favour with which, even in the marked revival of interest in eighteenth-century work during the last thirty years in France, they seem to have received. While not a few collections of eighteenth-century tales



have been (in some cases more than once or twice) reissued in modern garb, I cannot remember, during a long course of years in which I have had occasion to know of most new books in France, any reprint of them: while my booksellers declare themselves equally ignorant. And critical tone about them has been, if not exactly harsh, by no means very favourable.

In England, on the other hand, the vogue of the *Tales* was pretty early, and was long enduring. The British Museum catalogue contains fully half a dozen entries of translations; the title, as everybody knows, was adopted by Miss Edgeworth; the book was read by everybody, and traces of it (such as "the beautiful Cephalis" of Peacock) appear in places where only cunning literary trackers are likely to spy them. The fact is that the whole tone of the book was even better adapted to England than to France. That Marmontel had the orthodox *philosophe* respect for England (though he could not avoid falling into the pit which yawns for almost all his countrymen by bestowing upon two of his English heroes the names of Sir Harry *Adelton* and Lord Alfred *Orombel*, while he transliterated "Mac-laurin" into the fearful and wonderful form "Mackh-lorin") may have had something, but cannot have had very much, to do with the matter. He had more genuine appeals. His morality, which may have seemed occasionally excessive to Frenchmen, was sure to recommend him on this side the Channel: his licence, which may not have been great enough to give him bite and relish there, was not sufficient to scandalise *le cant Britannique* at a time when it was still by no means very squeamish.

And he hit or set the mood which is so prominent in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and of which Miss Edgeworth herself is the chief exponent in English *belles lettres*, a mood which made up its ideal of human life out of a curious blend of sceptical curiosity, human kindness, especially in the matter of the family affections, enjoyment of society, admiration of liberty, progress, and what not, a sort of rather vague and undogmatic religion, and a great adoration of "virtue". Except that *Sandford and Merton* is more definitely directed to childish things, the spirit of *Sandford and Merton* is very close indeed to that of Marmontel. And indeed this versatile and accomplished writer was very well fitted to put into popular form the floating ideas and notions of men rather greater than himself, and so to attract and captivate the attention of men rather less. He had not *plus que personne*, but more than most people *l'esprit que tout le monde a*.

To the English reader of the *Tales* to-day, on the other hand, a certain amount of preparation and accommodation may be necessary before they can be really enjoyed. For they are in some ways capital examples of an entire scheme of thought, sentiment, and phrase which has long been foreign to the phrase, the sentiment, the thought of Englishmen—which has indeed for something like two generations been rather distinctly the butt of Englishmen's ridicule. Even in France the extraordinary tearfulness of the "sensitivity" age—"sensible" and "sensibilité" in the sense which the title of Miss Austen's novel almost alone preserves for the ordinary reader occur on every page—

has for a considerable number of years seemed excessive: to Englishmen, it must still seem unmanly if not unintelligible. The cult of *ma mère* is still active across the Channel, where it is certainly not the worst of the prevalent cults: but even in France, few writers, I think, would to-day present, or for a considerable number of years would have presented, as Marmontel does, the hero of *The Bad Mother* running about the deck by turns exclaiming on his parent and disembowelling pirates. To Englishmen, here, again, the thing must seem not merely excessive, but positively ludicrous, at first sight. Yet all these things, all these fashions of sentiment and expression, are far more purely external than men are often willing to admit: they are, after all, the clothes, not the body, of thought and feeling: and an unfamiliar fashion of clothes, though nothing is more absurd at first sight, soon becomes familiar enough.

That it may become so, however, it may not be superfluous to make a sort of rough and general sketch—a kind of fashion-book—of the country in which the modern English reader will here find himself. Some of its features have been referred or alluded to already: but they may be put together here.

To the moral or emotional characteristics of the region, besides the habit of bursting into tears and that of invoking *ma mère*, must be added a very amiable confidence in the perfectibility of human nature. Even Marmontel's villains are very generally open to conversion; his middle characters are invariably so; and his good ones are angels according to this particular scheme

of the angelic. Not much more need be said than has been said about the technical "morality" of this scheme, except that it involves some approach to toleration of women's faults by men, as well as a very ample indulgence in the other direction. Nothing more characteristic of the difference in the point of view can be even imagined than the very slight effect produced upon the virtuous and, it would seem, affectionate Acelia, in *A Wife of Ten Thousand*, by her husband's confession of his costly infidelity with Eleonora. Even La Fontaine's ultra-philosophy of

Quand on le sait c'est peu de chose

hardly expresses the calmness with which Acelia condones the infidelity: and though she is seriously disturbed at the extravagance, her first thought is to visit "the other person", to treat her with much politeness, if with some frankness, and to stoop to chaffer in a fashion which to another stamp of honest woman would be not so much hard as impossible. But this apparent topsy-turvyness will last no longer than the time necessary for the reader to appreciate the singular contrast of the most solid sense co-existing with the most fantastic sensibility in this eighteenth century; and also the profound good nature which was one of its best features. For all what we are pleased to call its brutality, all its fondness for practical jokes, all the horrors of its prisons and its ships, its workhouses and its madhouses, all the vagueness and want of organisation of its philanthropy, it was probably the most good-natured century in modern history

As for other "customs of the country", the reader will find himself fully plunged into that very peculiar pseudo-classicalism—literary, historical, and miscellaneous—which prevailed long and widely over Europe, but attained full perfection only in France and only in the French eighteenth century. A "classic" in the cant literary sense Marmontel was not quite. He scandalised others besides Voltaire by speaking disrespectfully of Boileau; and what has been said above of his literary criticism generally will show that he had half-unconscious tendencies to the wholly unknown creed of Romanticism. But in externals his literary work simply reeks of that queer combination of toga and helmet with patch and powder which characterised his time. The odd macaronic nomenclature, half Greek, half non-descript; the occasional plunges into actual classical scenes; the maintenance of a sort of not too clearly understood Ciceronian standard of ethical propriety and philosophical orthodoxy—all this, mixed up as it is with direct and lively details of the day, gives a character to the general scenery and surroundings which is unmistakable, and (when once it has begun to be relished) not a little agreeable.

Hardest of all, perhaps, though habituation to it is to a great extent implied in getting accustomed to the other peculiarities just mentioned, is the language of the *Tales*. The French eighteenth century, as all students of it know, had two ways of speaking and writing, which, accurately and separately described, may seem the most "impossible", as Sir William Hamilton used to say, of all literary manners. The one

was a style of declamation at once dry and pompous, loaded with emphatic adjectives, and yet strangely destitute of colour or majesty, full of convention, too often bombastic when it tried to be forcible, and too often flat and tame when it discarded that endeavour. The other was a style of easy and more or less satiric narrative or conversation, which, if it sometimes sinned by a little too elaborate archness, was at its best the lightest, airiest, most attractive vehicle for badinage and bagatelle that is known or that is even conceivable, unless it be that lighter conversational style of Greek of which we have some glimpses in Plato and Aristophanes, and a fuller but late and mixed adumbration in Lucian. These two styles are rarely found quite apart, though Thomas, Marmontel's friend and contemporary, was an almost pure representative of the heavy and artificial style. Both are mixed in Marmontel himself, though, to do him justice, he seldom sins by the very worst kind of what the French call the "emphatic" style. But as Sainte-Beuve has partly confessed, one is constantly startled in him by the odd lapses of taste and judgment in this respect—constantly surprised to find a man not merely of wit but of positive humour, not merely of critical accomplishment but of critical taste, making false notes and discords, alternating a shrewd observation with an empty platitude, and a real *bon mot* with a sentence of fustian. But to this, too, we get accustomed, and without by any means losing sense of the weaknesses (which would be a pity), we can devote ourselves chiefly to the strong parts, which are numerous.

The tales here translated all belong to the first or

original collection of the *Contes Moraux*, which alone are included in the old translation, here presented in a revised form. A few tales are here omitted. *Alcibiade ou le Moi* was the first of the set, and very popular in its time, but is a rather commonplace satire on the selfishness of women, or rather the difficulty of being "loved for oneself". *Les Quatre Flacons* and *Heureusement* (the latter the object of Sainte-Beuve's preference) deserve something of the same description. In *Les Deux Infortunées*, *sensibilité*, according to the favourite French jingle, becomes *sensiblerie*. *L'Heureux Divorce* is a rather amusing anticipation of the stories of *amantium irae* which have become so common in France since the re-establishment of the institution referred to, and might have been given here if space had allowed. *Annette et Lubin* is a true tale, with a touch of *grivoiserie*. This and the others are excluded because some of them might have required "editing" to suit English tastes, though none can be said to exceed a very moderate degree of licence according to French standards.

It must, however, be said that this earliest and principal collection of *Contes Moraux* does not include all the stories of the kind that Marmontel produced. On the contrary, he frequently returned to the style during his later years, and the *Nouveaux Contes Moraux* fill rather more space than their forerunners. They are, however, distinguished from them in more ways than one: and not as a rule to their advantage, though some have a considerable interest. The earlier tales differ somewhat, but not very greatly in length, and on an average do not fill more than fifteen pages of the com-

pact French edition above referred to. The first of the *Nouveaux Contes* (it is true that it is a sort of nest of tales one within the other) fills more than seventy, and two others nearly as much between them. In these later stories, too, Marmontel, who in the earlier had introduced none but fictitious personages (or if, as was probably the case, he sometimes brought in real ones, had clothed them with fictitious names), draws on his memory and introduces Voltaire, D'Alembert, Vauvenargues, and others, *in propria persona*. The moralising object, too, becomes more prominent than ever, and the crisp and direct character of the stories is somewhat lost. Nevertheless, to mention only two, *Le Trépied d'Hélène* (in which a tripod fished out of the sea and ordered by Apollo to be given to "the wisest" is successively offered to each of the Seven Sages of Greece and declined by them, each confessing himself to have some remarkable lack of wisdom) is a lively and well-kept-up specimen of the classical tale with a purpose; and *La Cassette* (which, by the way, shows the widespread influence of these *Tales* in the fact that it supplied Miss Edgeworth with the most important incident in the *dénouement* of *Belinda*, or at least of the Delacour part of it) could rank very well with all but the best of the tales here presented.

Still it is by these *Tales* that Marmontel must be judged; and the batch is, I think, sufficiently varied as well as sufficiently interesting to justify him. Which is the best may be an idle but is an almost universal and unavoidable question. There are certainly few better than the very first, which with its celebration of the



*nez à la Roxelane* supplies a pleasantly impertinent complement and contrast to Pascal's remark about the length of Cleopatra's. Marmontel has certainly done nothing, nor has Voltaire himself done much, with a surer and lighter hand than the rapid and almost bewildering capitulation of the Sultan to this audacious little baggage, who does not even assume the virtues if she has them not, who is apparently superior to fear and jealousy, the most overmastering of passions, who is afraid of nothing except the absence of "men and her own way", and who sums up the whole situation unanswerably in the equation, "Vous êtes puissant; je suis jolie; nous voilà donc de pair".

*The Scruple* is perhaps a little less masterly, less universal; but it is very French and very eighteenth-century. *Lausus and Lydia* also deserves these epithets, but perhaps in a rather less complimentary sense. The habit of composing a sort of golden age of heroic virtues (with a few heroic vices, it is true) out of the scenes and characters of classical literature has long been unfamiliar to us, and it seems to us no doubt just as absurd (it cannot possibly seem more) as numerous literary habits of our own would have seemed to our great-great-grandfathers and will seem to our great-great-grandsons. Perhaps also in this style, which Fénelon made popular, the later *Samnite Marriages* is a better example. But *All or Nothing* is a very sprightly handling of the eternal contrast of the two lovers; and *The Pretended Philosopher* is capital. "Philosopher" indeed is, as has been frequently pointed out, by no means a very happy or exact version of "Philosophe",

but that cannot be helped, and the piquancy of the tale is by no means diminished by the fact that Marmontel himself was at once an unquestioned member (even of high degree) in the *philosophe* brotherhood, and a sort of outsider to it in certain respects. For all the shock that the Sorbonne was so kind as to experience from *Bélisaire* and *Les Incas*, his enthusiasm for the rationalist and freethinking campaign was of a strictly limited kind. It certainly stopped altogether short of the militant atheism of the Holbachian coterie; and it may be doubtful whether, except in the ardour of the novitiate, it reached Voltaire's dislike of positive creeds. The resemblance between Marmontel and Béranger was not likely to escape so acute a critic as Sainte-Beuve, and in fact nothing can better describe the attitude of the author of the *Contes Moraux* than the comfortable summing up, "Baise-moi, Suzon; et ne damnons personne". He was therefore perfectly free to satirise some little peculiarities in his good friends, and, to do him justice, he makes some good fun here of a few of his own. On the whole, however, it is Rousseau who is hit harder than anybody else in this tale.

The two *Mothers* approach the average merit of the *Tales* as near as any: if anything, they fall a little below it; but *The Shepherdess of the Alps* stands considerably higher. It has of course all the defects of Sensibility; its intense unpracticalness—the very thing that commended it to an eminently practical age—its high-flown and high-strung sentiment, and all the rest. But it also has something genuinely "touching", to use the word which Marmontel loves, and which is often so hard to

render in English—and it has in an eminent degree that semi-operatic illusion, that rose-pink and sky-blue scheme of colour, which, decry it as common sense or cynicism may, has an odd and enduring charm for *les âmes bien nées* in all ages. In *The Good Husband* and *The School for Fathers* the reforming morality of the time and its rather amiable belief in perfectibility by moral influence are fairly well illustrated, and *The Connoisseur* is one of the very best of the whole. Few portraits of the eighteenth-century *espiègle*—the damsel with *minois chiffonné* who has come down to us, as far as her physical charms go, better in the incomparable pastels of La Tour than even in Greuze—are more charming than that of Agatha. And even the most ambitious of women ought to be obliged to Marmontel for her clear conception of the fact that her uncle's not too honourable stratagem must anyhow turn to her and her lover's advantage, compared with the mixture of wounded vanity and lack of foresight which distinguishes her lover.

The apparently preposterous *donnée* of *The Sylph Husband*—though really the decade which has seen certain things both in London and Paris had better bethink itself a little before it dismisses Paracelsism as preposterous—ought not to hide the ingenuity of its conduct and the malicious fun of the final situation; so that this also belongs to the class of tales where the ephemeral element does not exclude the universal and permanent. Perhaps not quite so much can be said of *Lauretta*, which, if moral enough after a certain fashion, may give occasion to carpers to urge that if the heroine

had been a little less captivated with mere splendour and a little less ready to inflict torture on a lover of whom she had very little to complain, it would have been better. The same unpleasant person may say that Melidor in *A Wife of Ten Thousand* is such a very feeble creature that his reformation could have offered few difficulties, and presents as few points of interest; while, as has indeed been pointed out in a previous passage, Acelia's extremely business-like composition with her husband's mistress is not wholly pleasing. But this is only another of the innumerable difficulties of reconciling the mere taste of one time and that of another. *Friendship put to the Test* at least ought to find favour in England, if only for the first sentence, which is amusing to contrast with the appreciation by Gibbon and others of the English University system; nor should *The Misanthrope Corrected* suffer from the danger of continuations—of which, by the way, the eighteenth century tried several to Molière's famous creation, even going so far as to make the attempt in drama itself. Marmontel was wiser, and the subject gave him such scope for the treatment he preferred in these moral tales that it may rank with the very best of them.

It is a good finale; and it is not for nothing that the French and English editions, which for this reason or that do not always coincide in the order of the *Tales*, both put it in that position. For Marmontel's idea of life—which if not the best, is also very far from the worst—pretty well sums itself up in that of a "Misanthrope Corrected" by experience. He had never himself been misanthropical, or as we say now, pessimist; his

easy and unforced enjoyment of the good things of life, joined perhaps to a certain absence, already more than once referred to, of a too fastidious niceness, saved him from that defect, if it at the same time shut him out from certain transcendental excellences and sufferings. It was "human nature's daily food" that he hungered after; and it is not unsatisfactory to know that he seems to have had a very fair share of it. In his scheme there may be a little too much of the fairy tale, and not of the most elevated kind of fairy tale; but wheresoever there is a fairy tale of any kind there is the *unum necessarium* of literature and of life. Not to sulk, not to give yourself airs, not be content with or be discontented without the superfluous and exceptional, to do no ill to others and some good to yourself—these were his somewhat pagan but very decided merits.

I am afraid that he must underlie the curse (which I understand is a grave and frequent one on the lips of some of our wits of the present day) of having succumbed to and acquiesced in "the obvious". It is a serious condition. Yet, after all, perhaps this, like other things, is a misfortune susceptible of distinction. The fool of one kind takes the obvious because it gives him least trouble to do so; the fool of another rejects the obvious because that is the most obvious way, to him, of acquiring renown. To the wise man the *obvia*, as part of the *omnia*, themselves also *exeunt in mysterium*, and if he goes far enough, are not the least preferable road to it.

## LA COMÉDIE HUMAINE

. . . THERE are two things, then, which it is more especially desirable to keep constantly before one in reading Balzac—two things which, taken together, constitute his almost unique value, and two things (I think it may be added) which not a few critics have failed to take together in him, being under the impression that the one excludes the other, and that to admit the other is tantamount to a denial of the one. These two things are: first, an immense attention to detail, sometimes observed, sometimes invented or imagined; and secondly, a faculty of regarding these details through a mental lens or arrangement of lenses almost peculiar to himself, which at once combines, enlarges, and invests them with a peculiar magical halo or mirage. The two thousand personages of the *Comédie Humaine* are, for the most part, “signalled”, as the French official word has it, marked, and denoted by the minutest traits of character, gesture, gait, clothing, abode, what not; the transactions recorded are very often (more often indeed than not) given with a scrupulous and microscopic accuracy of reporting which no detective could outdo. Defoe is not more circumstantial in detail of fact than Balzac; Richardson is hardly more prodigal of character-stroke. Yet a very large proportion of these characters, of these circumstances, are evidently things invented or imagined, not observed. And in addition

to this, the artist's magic glass, his Balzacian speculum, if we may so say (for none else has ever had it), transforms even the most rigid observation into something flickering and fanciful, the outline as of shadows on the wall, not the precise contour of etching or of the camera.

It is curious, but not unexampled, that both Balzac himself, when he struggled in argument with his critics, and those of his partisans who have been most jealously devoted to him, have usually tried to exalt the first and less remarkable of these gifts over the second and infinitely more remarkable. Balzac protested strenuously against the use of the word "gigantesque" in reference to his work; and of course it is susceptible of an unhand-some innuendo. But if we leave that innuendo aside, if we adopt the sane reflection that "gigantesque" does not exclude "gigantic" or assert a constant failure of greatness, but only indicates that the magnifying process is carried on with a certain indiscriminateness, we shall find none, I think, which so thoroughly well describes him.

The effect of this singular combination of qualities apparently the most opposite, may be partly anticipated, but not quite. It results occasionally in a certain shortcoming as regards *vérité vraie*, absolute artistic truth to nature. Those who would range Balzac in point of such artistic veracity on a level with poetical and universal realists like Shakespeare and Dante, or prosaic and particular realists like Thackeray and Fielding, seem not only to be utterly wrong but to pay their idol the worst of all compliments, that of ignoring his

own special qualifications. The province of Balzac may not be—I do not think it is—identical, much less co-extensive, with that of nature. But it is his own—a partly real, partly fantastic region, where the lights, the shades, the dimensions, and the physical laws are slightly different from those of this world of ours, but with which, owing to the things it has in common with that world, we are able to sympathise, which we can traverse and comprehend. Every now and then the artist uses his observing faculty more, and his magnifying and (since there is no better word) distorting lens less; every now and then he reverses the proportion. Some tastes will like him best in the one stage; some in the other; the happier constituted will like him best in both. These latter will decline to put *Eugénie Grandet* above the *Peau de Chagrin*, or *Le Père Goriot* above the wonderful handful of tales which includes *La Recherche de L'Absolu* and *Le Chef d'Œuvre Inconnu*, though they will no doubt recognise that even in the two first-named members of these pairs the Balzacian quality, that of magnifying and rendering grandiose, is present, and that the martyrdom of Eugénie, the avarice of her father, the blind self-devotion of Goriot to his thankless and worthless children, would not be what they are if they were seen through a perfectly achromatic and normal medium.

This specially Balzacian quality is, I think, unique. It is like—it may almost be said to *be*—the poetic imagination, present in magnificent volume and degree, but in some miraculous way deprived and sterilised of the specially poetical quality. By this I do not of course



mean that Balzac did not write in verse: we have a few verses of his, and they are pretty bad, but that is neither here nor there. The difference between Balzac and a great poet lies not in the fact that the one fills the whole page with printed words and the other only a part of it—but in something else. If I could put that something else into distinct words, I should therein attain the philosopher's stone, the elixir of life, the *primum mobile*, the *grand arcanum*, not merely of criticism but of all things. It might be possible to coast about it, to hint at it by adumbrations and in consequences. But it is better and really more helpful to face the difficulty boldly, and to say that Balzac, approaching a great poet nearer perhaps than any other prose writer in any language, is distinguished from one by the absence of the very last touch, the finally constituting quiddity, which makes a great poet different from Balzac.

Now, when we make this comparison, it is of the first interest to remember—and it is one of the uses of the comparison, that it suggests the remembrance of the fact—that the great poets have usually been themselves extremely exact observers of detail. It has not made them great poets; but they would not be great poets without it. And when Eugénie Grandet starts from *le petit banc de bois* at the reference to it in her scoundrelly cousin's letter (to take only one instance out of a thousand), we see in Balzac the same observation, subject to the limitation just mentioned, that we see in Dante and Shakespeare, in Chaucer and Tennyson. But the great poets do not as a rule *accumulate* detail.

Balzac does, and from his very accumulation he manages to derive that singular gigantesque vagueness—differing from the poetic vague, but ranking next to it—which I have here ventured to note as his distinguishing quality. He bewilders us a very little by it, and he gives us the impression that he has slightly bewildered himself. But the compensations of the bewilderment are large.

For in this labyrinth and whirl of things, in this heat and hurry of observation and imagination, the special intoxication of Balzac consists. Every great artist has his own means of producing this intoxication, and it differs in result like the stimulus of beauty or of wine. Those persons who are unfortunate enough to see in Balzac little or nothing but an ingenious piler-up of careful strokes—a man of science taking his human documents and classing them after an orderly fashion in portfolio and deed-box—must miss this intoxication altogether. It is much more agreeable as well as much more accurate to see in the manufacture of the *Comédie* the process of a Cyclopean workshop—the bustle, the hurry, the glare and shadow, the steam and sparks of Vulcanian forging. The results, it is true, are by no means confused or disorderly—neither were those of the forges that worked under Lipari—but there certainly went much more to them than the dainty fingerings of a literary fretwork-maker or the dull rummagings of a realist *à la* Zola.

In part no doubt, and in great part, the work of Balzac is dream-stuff rather than life-stuff, and it is all the better for that. What is better than dreams? But the

coherence of his visions, their bulk, their solidity, the way in which they return to us and we return to them, make them such dream-stuff as there is all too little of in this world. If it is true that evil on the whole predominates over good in the vision of this "Voyant", as Philarète Chasles so justly called him (and I think it does, though not to the same extent as I once thought), two, very respectable—and in one case very large—though somewhat opposed divisions of mankind, the philosophic pessimist and the convinced and consistent Christian believer, will tell us that this is at least not one of the points in which it is unfaithful to life. If the author is closer and more faithful in his study of meanness and vice than in his studies of nobility and virtue, the blame is due at least as much to his models as to himself. If, as I fear must be confessed, he has seldom succeeded in combining a really passionate with a really noble conception of love, very few of his countrymen have been more fortunate in that respect. If in some of his types—his journalists, his married women, and others—he seems to have sacrificed to conventions, let us remember that those who know attribute to his conventions such a powerful if not altogether such a holy influence that two generations of the people he painted have actually lived more and more up to his painting of them.

And last of all, but also greatest, has to be considered the immensity of his imaginative achievement, the huge space that he has filled for us with vivid creation, the range of amusement, of instruction, of (after a fashion) edification which he has thrown open

for us to walk in. It is possible that he himself, and others more or less well-meaningly, though more or less maladroitly, following his lead, may have exaggerated the coherence and the architectural design of the *Comédie*. But it has coherence and it has design; nor shall we find anything exactly to parallel it. In mere bulk the *Comédie* probably, if not certainly, exceeds the production of any novelist of the first class in any kind of fiction except Dumas, and with Dumas, for various and well-known reasons, there is no possibility of comparing it. All others yield in bulk; all in a certain concentration and intensity; none even aims at anything like the same system and completeness. It must be remembered that owing to shortness of life, lateness of beginning, and the diversion of the author to other work, the *Comédie* is the production, and not the sole production, of some seventeen or eighteen years at most. Not a volume of it, for all that failure to reach the completest perfection in form and style which has been acknowledged, can be accused of thinness, of scamped work, of mere repetition, of mere cobbling up. Every one bears the marks of steady and ferocious labour, as well as of the genius which had at last come where it had been so earnestly called and had never gone away again. It is possible to overpraise Balzac in parts or to mispraise him as a whole. But so long as inappropriate and superfluous comparisons are avoided and as his own excellence is recognised and appreciated, it is scarcely possible to overestimate that excellence in itself and for itself. He stands alone; even with Dickens, who is his nearest analogue, he shows far more points of

difference than of likeness. His vastness of bulk is not more remarkable than his peculiarity of quality; and when these two things coincide in literature or elsewhere, then that in which they coincide may be called, and must be called, Great, without hesitation and without reserve.

1895

## TALES FROM FLAUBERT

WHEN, some dozen years ago, Flaubert's representatives at last made up their minds to publish the mass of his early (and by himself suppressed, or rather never uttered) novice-work, there were those who thought they did well to be angry: and perhaps they were not wrong. It is always rather doubtful business to publish what an author has not published: but in Flaubert's case there seemed to be worse than doubt. It was perfectly well known, from his own confessions as well as from the testimony of those who knew him, that though he was not, in the German phrase, one "who could never be ready", he was probably *the* one of all men of letters who took most trouble in getting himself ready, and was most ruthless in sacrificing what he thought was *not* ready. The extraordinarily silly as well as vulgar taunt of Edmond de Goncourt that Flaubert just got the best epithets *de tout le monde*, while he, Edmond, and his brother, Jules, only used such as were their own private invention, is in reality an almost grovelling admission of his greatness. Any clever fool can, as Miss Edgeworth's little boy, not at all foolishly, says, "call his hat Cadwallader", but it takes more or less of a genius to select the best epithet *de tout le monde* for a particular hat in a particular context.

From more than one side the objections were justified. By far the greater part of the *Œuvres Premières* had no

value except for a curiosity which, in the better class of readers, probably felt a little ashamed of itself. Not that there was anything discreditable in the work: it was simply an obvious failure. Much of it had the extravagant diablerie, horror, griminess, etc., which was the wrong hall-mark, as we may call it, of the earlier Romanticism of the lower class, like Janin's *Âne Mort* and Borel's *Champavert*, with which Flaubert's own stuff was nearly contemporary. Almost all of it, to a reader who was not a child or a fool, was quite evidently that half-done work which proverbially ought not to be shown or told to children and fools themselves, and from which even those who are not children or fools can derive only a sort of pseudo-scientific, not an honestly aesthetic, pleasure. One does indeed see, from the first version of the *Éducation Sentimentale*, how he could improve things; and can at least guess how much he *would* have improved *Bouvard et Pécuchet*: but this was hardly *tanti*.

The comparison, however, of the earlier (1849-56) versions of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* with its final form in 1874 is an altogether different matter: and though probably only a few readers would care to have the complete texts side by side, as they ought to be for full critical appreciation of the facts, it may be worth while, before taking account of the "definitive" form *as* definitive, to consider "the excellent differences"—a Shakespearean phrase which applies here itself excellently. It must be remembered that in this case there was actual or partial publication and republication; that instead of rejection there was simply amelioration.

Of course, there have been the usual eccentrics—perhaps occasionally sincere but much more often not—who have pretended to prefer the first form. If you only take the good old *Respice finem* for guide, that matter ought to be easily settled. All ending—all real ending—should be quiet, by whatever disquiet it is preceded. This is managed consummately in the latest form: it is not so in the first. I hardly know anything of the kind finer than the conclusion as we now have it. Sunrise and silent prayer, the terrors of the night having vanished, and the face of Christ dominating all. To use a homely parallel, the ingredients of the early version are not thoroughly mixed and, though not uncooked, not thoroughly cooked: there is still a sort of rawness about them.

It was, of course, necessary to read the two versions together carefully while preparing this Preface to the later one, and to give full weight to what M. Louis Bertrand's editorial care did for the earlier some twenty years ago, before Flaubert's still earlier attempts were released or dug up, whichever phrase may be preferred. His chief argument—true in its facts, though questionable in its effect—is that this earlier one, some fragments of which had always been known as having appeared in the *Artiste* under Gautier's editorship, had more pure Early Romanticism in it than the later. It certainly has, and in fact was certain to have. But it has also much more of the faults of 1830, as it was also certain to have: and it has a good deal of one of the worst of those faults—the attempt to reach the great Romantic vague by a sort of higgledy-



piggledy disorder. It seems, from a most interesting pair of quotations from Flaubert's manuscripts, one original, the other copied from his friend George Sand's *Mlle la Quintinie*, that he had (at least at first) intended to depict a general tone *d'abrutissement, d'idiotisme, et de fatigue* in the Saint, on which George Sand comments and which she explains George-Sandically. Now something of this undoubtedly suits the situation of Anthony, being confronted with all these mysteries and terrors in the first place with the Devil among and behind them; and with "the awful rose of Dawn" and God Himself in it, behind and over all. But in the earlier version this situation and this attitude have not got "disembroiled" enough. The incidents and the personification are in the hands of the group of Seven Deadly Sins, *plus* Logic, and in some way stage-managed by the Devil; the Saint is in a state of undignified fussiness too often; his pig, though a relief, seems generally superfluous, and at least once makes a plusquam-piggish and merely nasty speech; while the episode of Apollonius and Damis, which even in the final form one may think a little overdone, seems more disproportionate and out of place than ever.

Above all, there is no Hilarion.

Now it is no extravagance to say that it is worth while to read this first version if for nothing else than because you cannot perceive the full importance of this character unless you know that he is a *new* character, and can appreciate not merely what he *is* but what he *does*. It is, of course, possible that Flaubert might have found some other ways of getting rid of the defects of

1849-56: but he could hardly have found a better. The part supplies a sort of concatenation or mortar to the other parts. Anthony's supposed familiarity with the person (a former disciple of his) steadies the Saint, and gives, if a dangerous, a useful mouthpicce for the treacherous and ungodly suggestions which come much better from the other than from those chattering Deadlies and that most illogical Logic. As a scholar and a divine he serves as a special excuse for all the Heresiarchs and their crews who in the earlier version turn up rather too promiscuously. But more of him presently.

On the other hand, the abolition of "Science" who appears in the earlier version as a separate *persona*, is, though a less constant gain, a considerable one. She is quite out of place in such a scene, such a company, and such a time: nor is she, as perhaps by some *tour de force* she might have been, adjusted to all three. All through, moreover, there are touches of what I believe it is fashionable now to call architectonic—which certainly had not been achieved in '49, but which were delightfully visible in '74. I have always thought the *Tentation* by far Flaubert's greatest work: but I certainly should not have thought so if it had been only represented by the earlier version. Indeed the *Artiste* fragments—that about Nebuchadnezzar and others—would, if they had stood by themselves, have given a false impression. They might have made one think the rest of the *Tentation* better than it was, but then they could hardly have suggested that the author would make that rest so triumphantly good as it actually is.

Of course, the use of such a word as "triumphantly"

will shock or disgust or amuse people who agree with M. Faguet as to Gautier's *La Morte Amoureuse* being a *diablerie puérile*, with our Modernists as to the supernatural element in Religion being merely "magic", and so on; but of them and with them we do not reason. It is permissible, as a certain ancient saying has it, for Dorians to speak Doric: and Literature, which is a somewhat supernatural thing itself, has proved long ago in a decidedly triumphant fashion that it is permissible for it to speak of the supernatural. But it must, by the same general tenor of law, speak of the supernatural, as of everything else, in a literary manner—that manner involving the observance of certain principles and methods, some at least of which have been discovered and set forth by persons from Aristotle of Stagira down to men of the present day: but many of which are not quite formulable, and are rather to be recognised by and in their results than indicated *a priori*.

Besides the great improvement of the introduction of Hilarion, the later version enjoys a much larger imparting of the elaborate stage-direction.

I have not the least idea whether Mr. Hardy derived from Flaubert any suggestion of the magnificent things of this kind in *The Dynasts*: but I know no third example of anything like such success in the use of a device which might be simply a bore; which might also be made a mere substitute for something else; but which can be and is here made to support and, as it were, present that "something else" with fullest dramatic effect. I can conceive objection being taken to the length of the Saint's preliminary discourse: but it seems to me

essentially right. He has got to survey his life: and the reader or spectator (for there are not many actual dramas which present what is presented by them so forcibly as this) has to have it surveyed for him in order that the cause of the *Tentation*—that mixture of tedium of life and regret for it which gives the Devil standpoint and grip-hold—may arise. It arises: the passages chosen as *Sortes Biblicae* being cunningly adjusted to fit the danger.

In the earlier version the temptations had been immediate and direct: they are here less so, and are preceded by a sort of dream which shows him that the life, as to the actual course of which he had been half grumbling, half regretting, might have been one of splendour in Church and State. He has seen a vision of Nebuchadnezzar in pomp, but he wakes and, as a form of penitence, flogs himself. This ambiguous process results in the first personal temptation—no less than the appearance of the Queen of Sheba. The sign of the cross saves him, but only just: and Balkis departs with a mixture of sigh and sneer. But she leaves—Hilarion.

The way in which the Tempter (for such the old disciple really is) insinuates himself after a slightly uncanny overture which sustains the uncanniness of the whole atmosphere, is admirable. He is familiar with the Saint's ways; they have talked of all these things before; he can edge in doubts, *aporias*,<sup>1</sup> simple questions, quite naturally. And so the ghostly congregation

<sup>1</sup> We want an English word for this. "Difficulty" is thus meant but is not quite good enough. "Poser" is near but undignified.

and procession of the Heresiarchs comes on the stage quite appropriately, though the figures vary from personages who hardly deserve to be called Christians at all; like Manes and the wilder Gnostics, to "Fathers" by something more than courtesy, but obviously questionable on points, like Tertullian and Origen. Gymnosophists, Simon Magus and his "Ennoia"<sup>1</sup> (pretended successor of Helen), follow and are followed by Apollonius of Tyana and his faithful Damis. I have, I think, said before that Apollonius does not so much appeal to me: but only the cross itself, embraced, and not merely signed for, saves Anthony; and his reflections after the Tyanian disappears are rather doubtful. He admits indeed that the splendours of Nebuchadnezzar had not dazzled him, nor the charms of Balkis allured him so much. He begins to speculate on various forms and notions of Divinity: and this lets Hilarion in again.

The reader will hardly want much guide or comment along the way in which he, who is now almost declaredly Hilarion-Satanas, avails himself of this dangerous mood of displaying *all* religions, from the clumsiest idols to Buddha (the fiend occasionally making Mephistophelian suggestions of Christian parallels), through Oannes, Belus, Ormuzd, the Ephesian Diana, Cybele, Isis, and so to Olympus itself—for a moment in all its glory, attracting Anthony's admiration. But Hilarion makes the mistake of too open propaganda: and the Saint with a sort of wrench, though sighing at each

<sup>1</sup> Thought personified—very much personified.

clause, pronounces the Lord's Prayer. Whereat the cross throws its shadow on the sky and there follows a *Götterdämmerung* which I have always liked to compare with Heine's (not the poem under that title, but the one specially called *Die Götter Griechenlands*) in the *Buch der Lieder*. Minor Divinities follow and even the special deity of the Jews as the "Lord of Hosts" is made to pass, in order probably to give an entrance to the Devil himself as the Devil, but in his archangelic form. He carries the Saint through space, shows him its vastness, and only at last, when all other hope of safety seems gone, makes the demand for Adoration of himself, and denial or blasphemy of God. But Anthony does not comply; and, apparently abandoned in the Void, wakes to find himself in front of his own cave—alive but exhausted, and by no means even yet in a hallowed state of mind. I suppose that it is at this point that a certain kind of criticism finds most fault with the *Tentation* as we have it. The refusal of Adoration should have settled the matter and given a satisfactory "curtain". As a matter of fact it does not do so: there are two scenes to come before the great if almost eventless close which has been spoken of above. The first, which one might think something of a repetition, is a last and concentrated effort on the part of the two temptresses, Suicide and Voluptuousness, to get Anthony, one or the other, for their prey. It is very powerfully done and can be pleaded for. He has seen all worlds, all faiths, all philosophies. They are all vanity. Why not finish with it all? or, if not, be content with that sensual pleasure which, whatever may be said

against it, and whatever payment for itself it may exact, is at any rate *something*?

But he succumbs to neither; and they finally wrestle with and defeat each other, leaving him rather proud than anything else. (In the earlier version Pride appears constantly throughout as the chief tempter.) They are succeeded by another quaint duel of the Sphinx and a Chimera (negation and delusion) half fighting, half making love: while these in turn give place to phantasmagoria of less important and famous monsters, from pygmies and Cynocephali through Basilisks and Griffins to the Catoblepas and the Martichoras (I always liked the spelling *Mantichora* better), who figure in the furthest Fauna of Fancy. These appearances of animals change to birds, fishes, even vegetables, if not bacilli, and Anthony seems to recover animation at the presence (if with a sort of pan-theistical suggestion) of life, even in a bewildering multitude of infinitesimal forms, descending to the lowest. Then and not till then comes the end, glanced at before: the Saint returning, with the light and under the face of Christ, to the quiet prayer to which at first and throughout he has been unable to resign himself. In comparison with this, the end of the earlier version, where the Devil, though acknowledging himself beaten for the time, departs with jeers and threats to return, seems distinctly inferior: and that not merely on the strength of preference for a "happy ending". There are some interesting fragments of the first draft: or rather there are some passages which M. Bertrand thought best not to incorporate in but add to the presentation of that draft or series of

drafts which he gave. And some people may regret the expulsion of the pig, specially when he wakes and feels the sun and says, "What a jolly sun! I was in such a funk to-night." But the thing could never have been brought off as a mystery-farce: and it *has* been at last brought off as a mystery-romance.

In passing from the *Tentation* to the *Trois Contes* there is a point which, though it can seldom have been missed by careful readers of Flaubert, should perhaps be put before beginners in the reading of him. These three small stories are—whether intentionally or not—curiously like miniatures of his three larger ones, leaving out *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, which, as noticed elsewhere, was itself a shorter story expanded. It might, of course, be—and probably has been—contended that this indicates the kind of limitation of genius which is also elsewhere glanced at, and which, by people who like the sort of thing, may be connected further with speculations about what they themselves would doubtless call the author's mentality. For us that does not matter. But the fact remains that the *Legend of St. Julian* connects in the closest way with the *Tentation* itself, that *Hérodias* is almost as closely connected with *Salammbô*, and that though Madame Bovary is a thoroughly bad and worthless woman, while Félicité is a saint if ever there was one, both are essentially of the lower class of French country-women, and the surroundings of both were the French countryside. Flaubert has chosen to show how, if he had used the usual condiments of French novel-writing there, he could do without them here. And he has done it.



It is difficult to think of any other example, so audaciously successful, of the pure art of tale-telling as the first. There is almost what is called in theology a *kenosis*, an emptying out, of all that is usually called "interest". As has often been pointed out elsewhere, France had shown the short story as such to be indigenous for many a century: and quite late in the preceding one Marmontel had made it clear that neither naughtiness nor the supernatural, nor high comedy, nor strong tragedy, nor exciting events and eccentric characters of any kind were necessary to success in it. Flaubert's own "realist" contemporaries and juniors were at any rate pretending to be real; but almost always tending to the uglier sides of reality, and endeavouring to set this off with more or less elaborate style. In *Un Cœur Simple* Flaubert is more absolutely commonplace in subject than the most "ordinary" phrase of Marmontel: and never for one moment suggests either Edmond de Goncourt's strictly monopolised epithets nor Paul de Saint-Victor's (it is true that this was not intended for tale-telling) alleged habit of dotting down lovely words all over a sheet of paper and then just filling up the spaces with some sort of context. Take the most tempting passage in *A Simple Heart* for contrast with these, and further compare it with M. Zola's one, and in part not dissimilar, effort in "propriety", *Le Rêve*. Take the death (or afterdeath) scene of Virginie here, and if you have any critical faculty the difference will give you some occupation and, I hope, much pleasure. You will find the scene presented (though the phrase may seem indecorous) "to

the life”: but without the very slightest sign of effort in its portrayal, or attempt to deck it up with ornament. The mother sobbing at the foot of the bed *qu’elle tenait dans les bras* is a good sample. There is scarcely one writer in a hundred who could have refrained from adding somewhat to this scarce half-dozen words which would not have spoilt or weakened them—an adverb to *tenait*, an adjective to *couche* at the very least. “

It would perhaps be absurd to deny, and not very wise to overlook, some designed and deliberate contrast between the substances of the first and second of these *contes*. The first is, from its own first to its last, photographic; its objects and subjects, its incidents and characters, are those of every place and every day, with only localities of colour in place and tone in time allowed for. The substance of the second is medieval legend. But there is hardly the least attempt to clothe this substance with what has been called in English “Wardour Street” language to suit. The final paragraph in the original—*Alors le Lépreux l’étreignait*, and the rest—is, if a foreigner may with due humility give his opinion on such a point, one of the very finest known to him in modern French literature, for suiting of sound to sense, for rhythm, for selection of vocabulary: yet there is not a single word in it which is not quite an ordinary word by itself, or which is put in any startling collocation of phrase. A wonderful picture with wonderful music attending and assisting its exhibition: but with as little “apparatus” about it as well could be. And all that has come before, though less worked up, is worked up in the same way. The grim irony of the last

hunt, the useless and ineffectual slaughter which at once satirises the hunter's former practice and irritates his present mood so as to make him more likely to commit the crime-error that is to follow—might easily have been made farcical or overdone in the other direction: but it is kept just right. The peculiar *gravity* which Flaubert maintains in both those stories is not quite like anything else. He has managed to keep all affectation out of it, and even to forgo, what the very greatest have not always forgone, a single flash, or one or two flashes, from behind the curtain to enliven or reassure the audience: yet he is never, in clause or in page, dull.

*Hérodias*, like its elder, less historical but more elaborately storied sister *Salammbô*, though not quite to the same extent, has been scarcely so great a favourite as some others of its author's works, and certainly less popular than its two companions in the same volume. *They* are almost invulnerable: you can pick holes in *it*. The curious Romantic fancy (perhaps a revenge for Boileau's condemnation of harmless Frankish names) for oddly spelt appellations—the fancy which made Gautier himself remark of Leconte de Lisle's transliterations of Hellenic names that "it would be simpler to write in Greek"—is rather too prominent. Saint John Baptist need not object to being called, as he is on Oxford class-lists, "Dī. Joh. Bap.", but one does not think he would like "Iaokanan"—at any rate it looks very ugly in French or English. The introduction of Aulus Vitellius—long before he became Emperor, but when his manners and morals were already bad and

his customs disgusting—has no relevance whatever. Herodias (whom one fancies as a less fascinating but hardly less fatal Cleopatra) is quite without charm; and Salome is almost a “super” except for her actual dance, and quite a *muta persona* except for the fatal demand. The Saint himself is for the most part hidden in his dungeon. There is indeed in Antipas the making—the “bones”—of a considerable character in novel if not in drama: but there is no place or scope for him as that. Perhaps the most striking thing in the whole is the last touch, when after the Tetrarch has stared for hours through the night at the severed head with which he has been left alone, it is carried off by sympathisers who, “as it is very heavy, carry it by turns”. And even this is one of those “asides” which, as was noted above, appear to be deliberately avoided in the other two stories. Indeed there are grounds for believing that as Flaubert intended contrast of subject but agreement in manner to be shown in these others, he meant *Hérodiade* to differ in substance and in handling as well.

Even in this appears, however, to an extraordinary extent, and in the other two and the *Tentation* consummately, the “greatness as a writer” (*comme écrivain*) which even M. Scherer admitted. It is difficult to say whether that acute but prejudiced and perhaps rather narrow-sighted critic hated Romantics or Realists most: and without deciding between those who claim Flaubert as either, the mere fact of the double claim shows that there must have been something of both in him. Yet there was, as must be seen from what has just been said, enough of something *else* in him, in the eyes of

perhaps the most uncompromising censor of his time taking France and England together, not perhaps to "make up", but to be allowed in his favour. The present writer would, of course, allow much more, or rather hardly proceed by the way of allowances at all. From the opportunities of comparison with his first drafts we see that Flaubert practically got rid of all that was bad on the Romantic side, and that he never *published* anything inexcusably bad on the Realist. It is indeed probable, though one need not accept *L'Éducation Sentimentale* as a sufficient proof of it, that his range was not very wide; that it did not extend at all to sheer and cheerful comedy; and that intricacies of character were beyond it. People like King Alfonso el Sabio (they say it is rather unfair to translate that "wise" and that it only claims "learning"), who think that the Creator might now and then have taken a hint with advantage, might themselves have made Flaubert rather a poet than a novelist, and rather a painter than either. I am, I confess, quite content with him as he is. And though perhaps *Madame Bovary* ought to be known, lest his range should be thought even more limited than it is, I do not think he is quite so much at the top of his own artistic and literary power there as here.



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